Esquire

BACK TO REALITY

THE SUITS, SHOES, PANTS, AND TIES *(Yes, Ties!)* YOU'LL WANT THIS FALL

+

The Perfect Fall Jacket

Leslie Odom Jr. GOES MANO A MANO *with* THE SOPRANOS

WE'VE GOT BAD NEWS *about your* ALIEN OBSESSION

Down & Out in My Family's Thai Restaurant

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is doing great, thanks.

Esquire
OWEN WILSON
SEPTEMBER 2021
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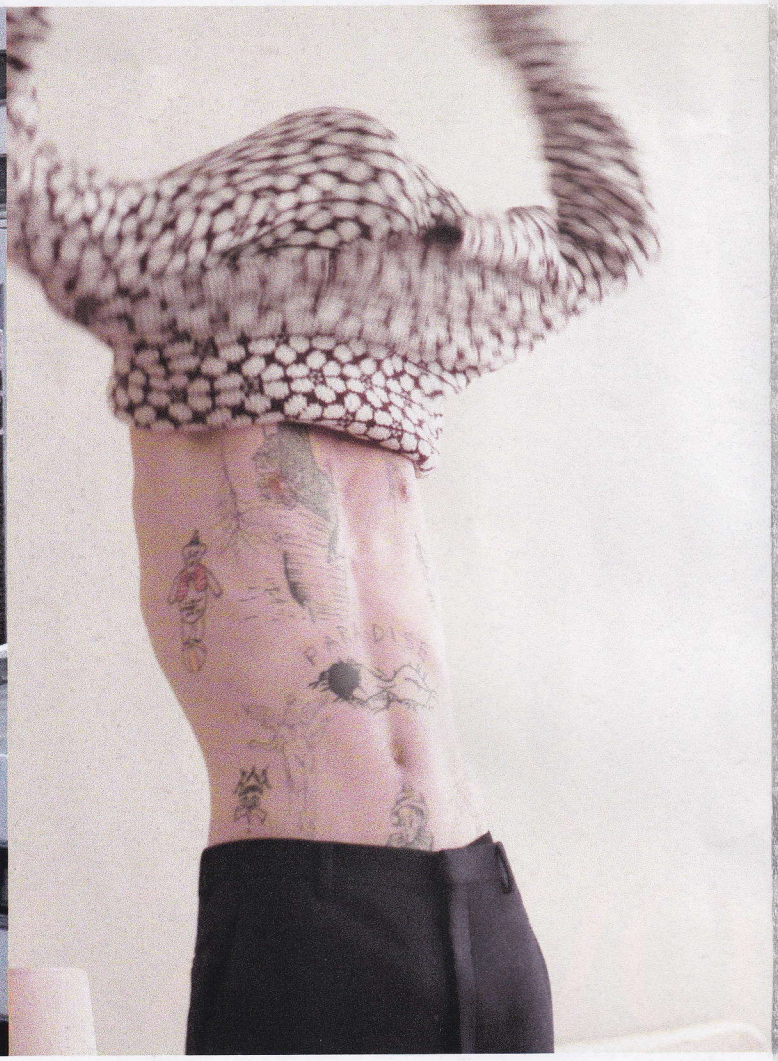

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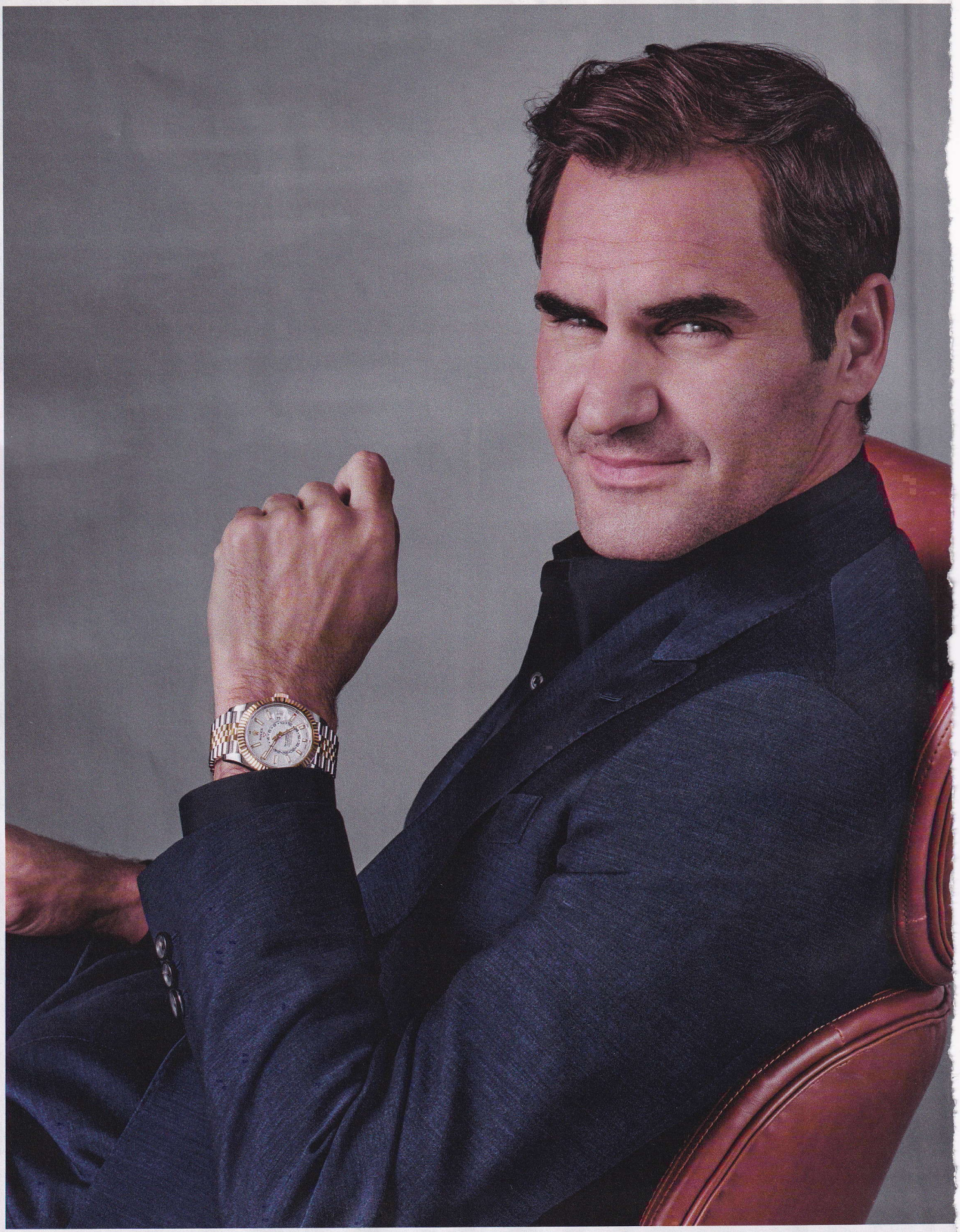
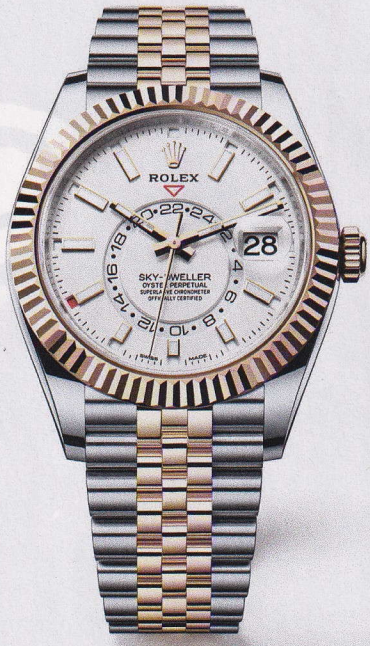


WHO'S COUNTING?

With Roger Federer, numbers alone are somewhat dizzying. 20 Grand Slam® titles, 103 ATP titles, 310 weeks as World No. 1, more than 1,240 victories… and counting. The geometry is also quite staggering: the backhand slices and accelerated forehands impossibly tangent to the sidelines, the trajectories of the serves and the angles of the volleys. But from now on, whatever the scoreboard says can only make his legend grow. Because his game plays out mostly in non-computable fields: the grace of his every movement, his efforts seemingly effortless, his elegance on and off the courts… **In time, Roger Federer's legacy will prove more perpetual than any number.**

#Perpetual



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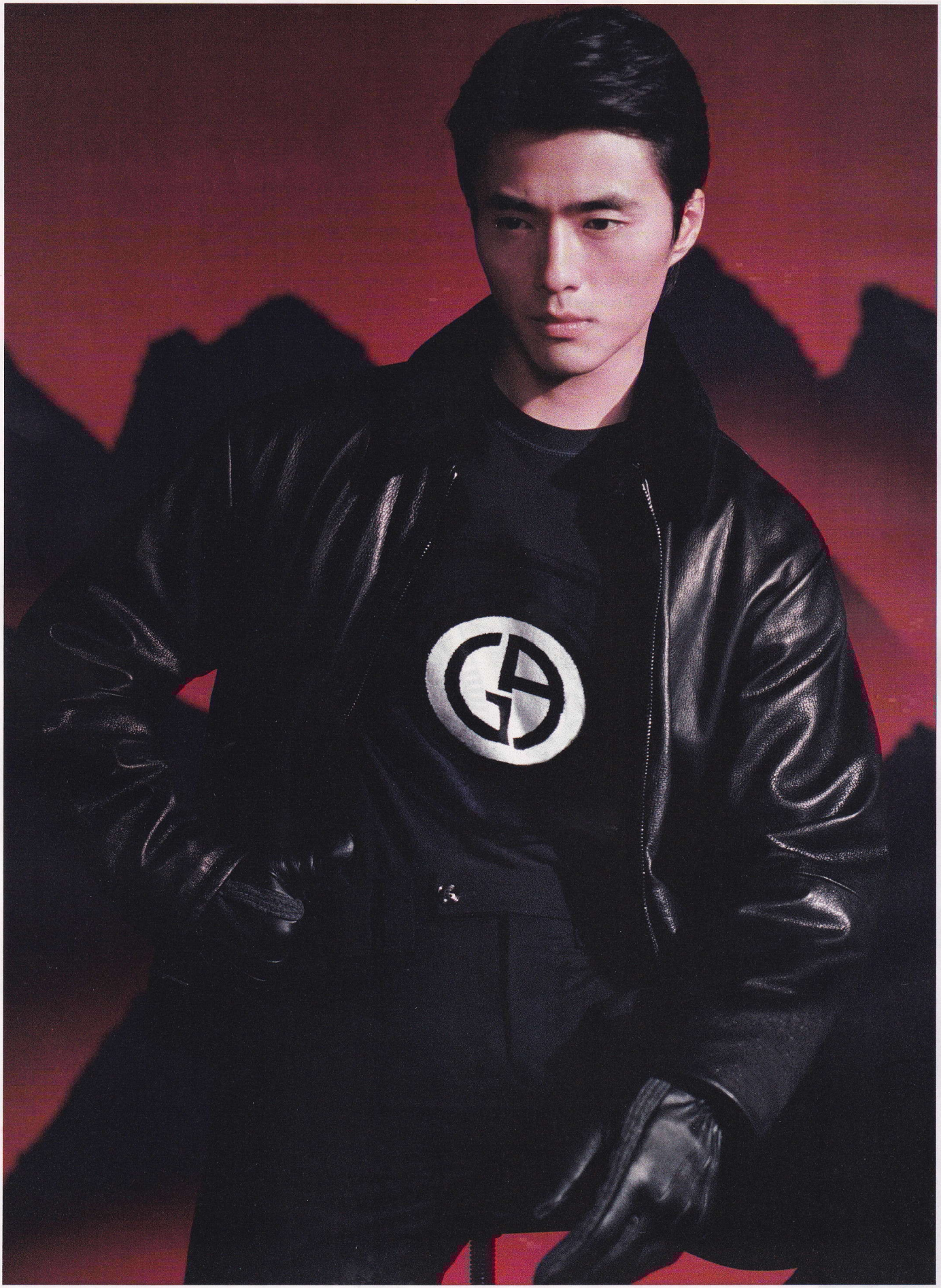

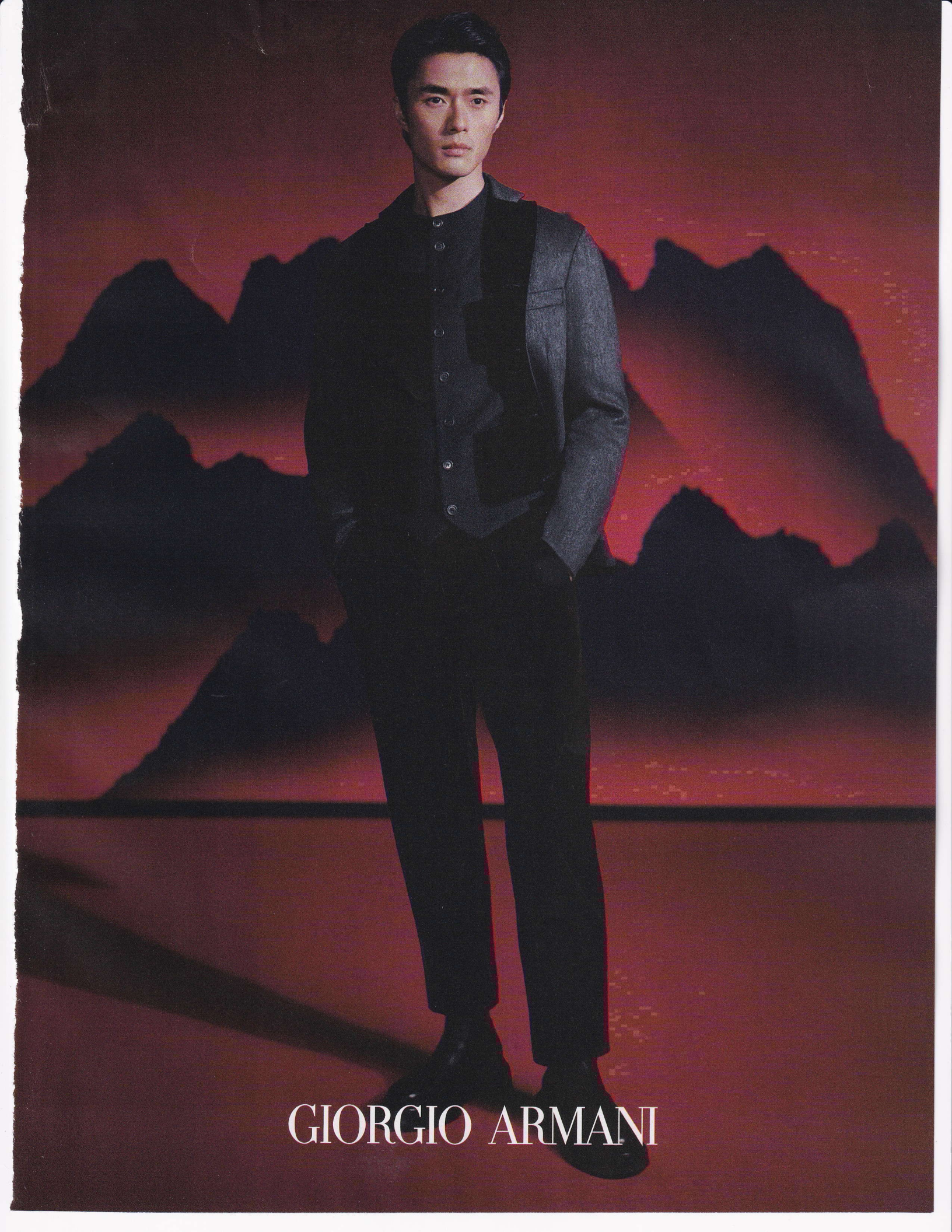
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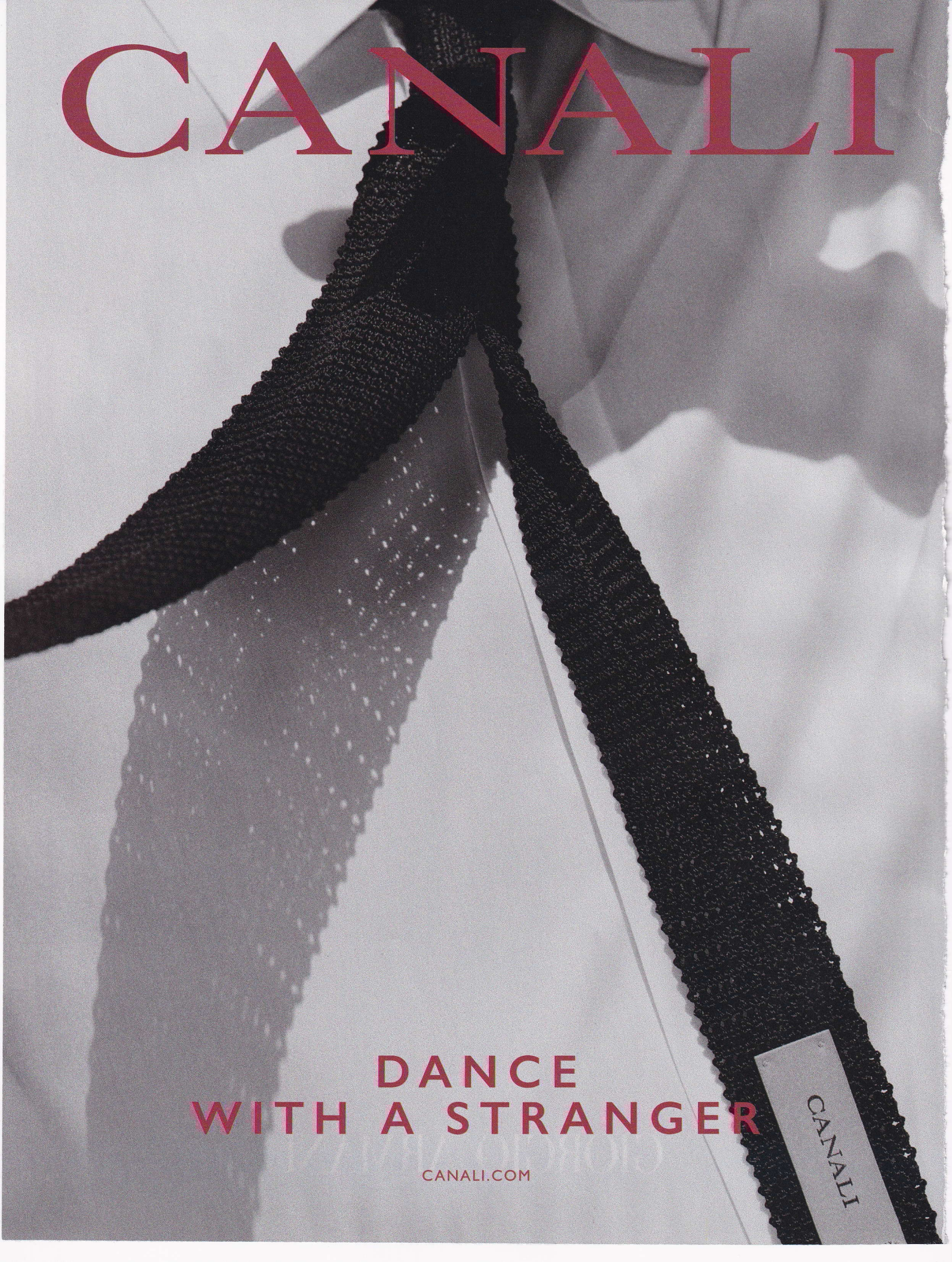
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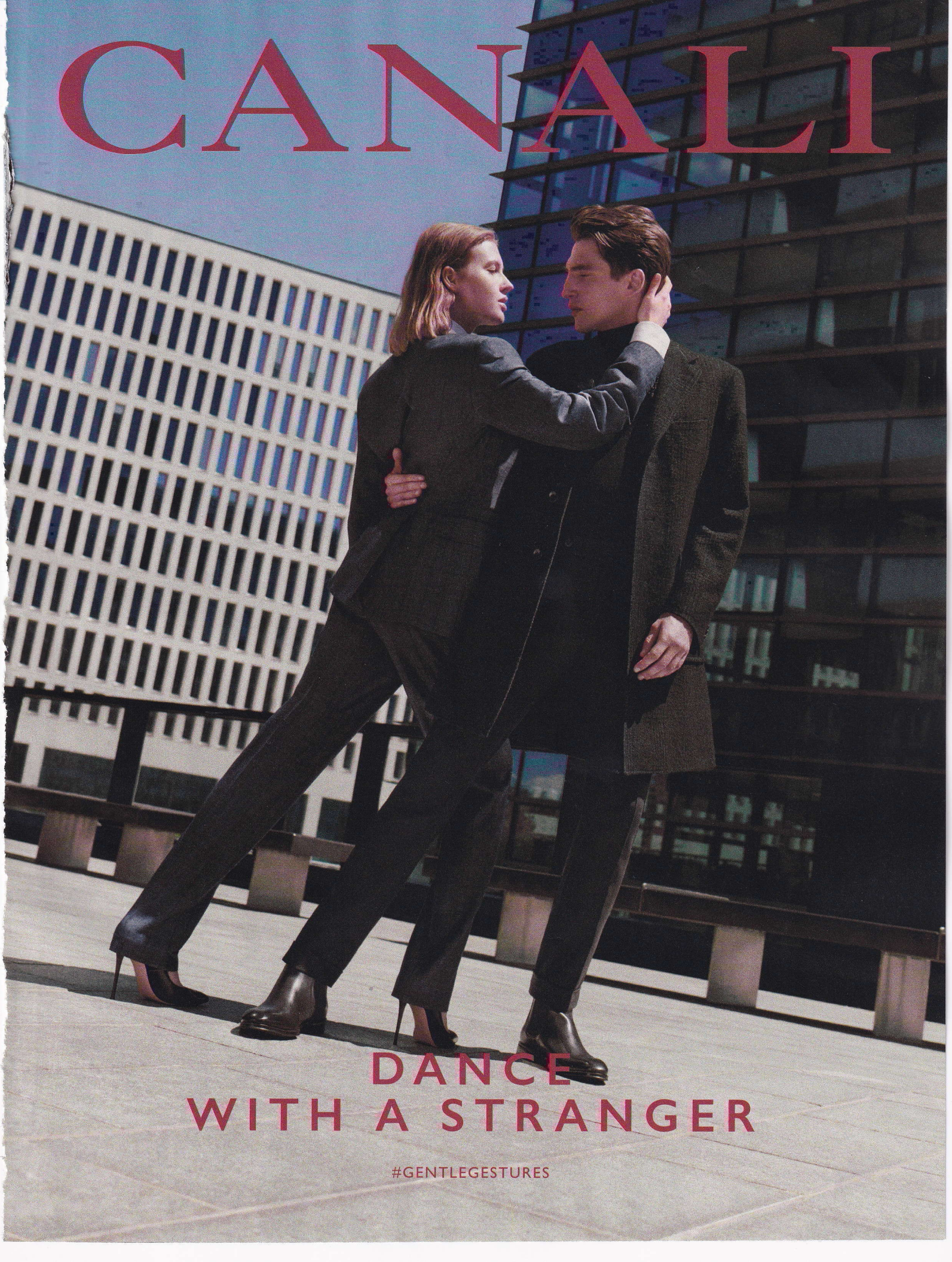
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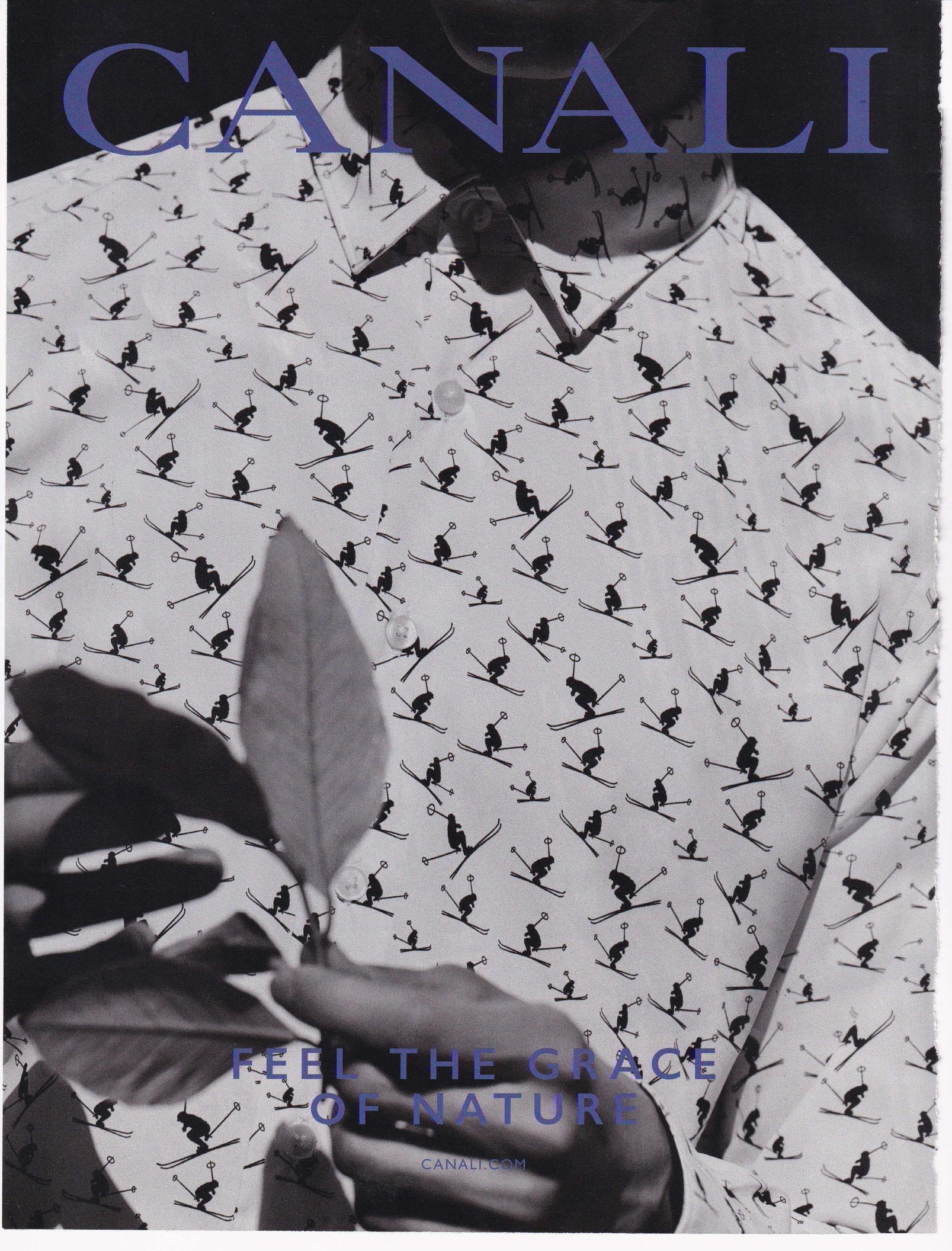
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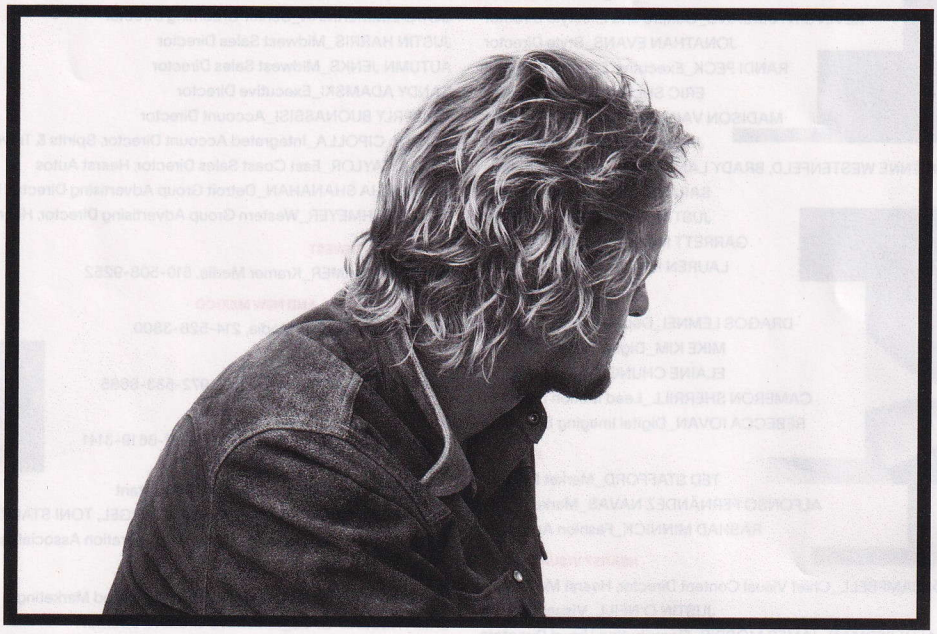
TABLE OF CONTENTS
SEPTEMBER 2021

Welcome to Esquire.

Owen Wilson turns for his close-up on page 74.



JACKET BY **DOUBLE RL.**

24 EDITOR'S LETTER

THE SHORT STORIES

27 Why we're asking all the wrong questions about aliens; a drink for your best post-vax life; desk objects beautiful enough to get you back to the office.

COLUMNS

41 HOW DID WE GET HERE?
Dispatches from the New Middle Age.
by John J. Lennon

44 FROM THE ESQUIRE POLITICS DESK
The Phantom Revolution.
by Charles P. Pierce

THE METHOD

47 The varsity jacket grows up; maintain your beard like a pro; the menswear store for this moment; the sweater vest is cool again (yes, *again*); a bright new riff on a classic watch.

61 IT'S TIME TO REALLY START DRESSIN'
For a while there, putting on clothes felt pointless. Now it's time to try again.

FEATURES

74 COVER: BASED ON A TRUE STORY
by Ryan D'Agostino
Owen Wilson has a cold. But that's nothing a few avocado pancakes and the magic of life can't fix. Three days with the star of *Loki*, *The French Dispatch*, and all those movies you know by heart.

84 THIS BOY'S (WORKING) LIFE
by Kevin Sintumuang
My parents opened one of the first Thai restaurants in New Jersey. To us, the place was so much more than just a business. But what would my parents' American dream ultimately mean for me?

88 WHAT I'VE LEARNED: TIM McGRAW
Interview by Madison Vain
"They say you're not supposed to fight in front of your kids. Everyone fights in front of their kids. That's part of the deal."

90 WE RISE OR FALL TOGETHER
by Scott Raab
Twenty years ago, the Twin Towers came down. Raab, who covered the effort to raise One World Trade, argues that the American spirit is stronger than the forces that try to tear us apart.

96 ON DECK
by Sarah Rense
Skateboarding at the Olympics? When Cory Juneau was growing up in southern California, the idea was laughable. Now it's reality, and he's an Olympian. Sick!

100 REBEL REBEL...
There's no better way to revolt against the ubiquity of casual everything than to put on a sharp new suit.

110 UP TROUBLE MOUNTAIN
by Micah Ling
Suicides, homelessness, and climate disasters are now prevalent in America's wilderness parks. The rangers who care for them wonder how long they can last.

116 NOT F*CKING AROUND
by Alex Bhattacharji
Leslie Odom Jr. has exploded into the Hollywood stratosphere. He got here by saying no.

126 THE ESQUIRE EDITORIAL BOARD ENDORSES...
The baseball fight.

ON THE COVER

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Published at 300 West Fifty-seventh Street, New York, NY 10019-3797. Editorial offices: 212-649-4020. Advertising offices: 212-649-4050 ® www.esquire.com. Printed in the U. S. A.

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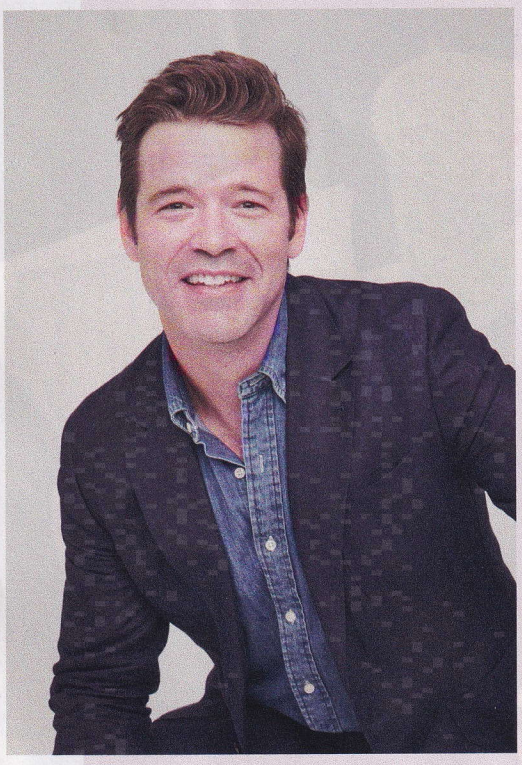
THE GREAT RESET



IN EARLY MAY, AFTER RECEIVING MY second dose of the Covid vaccine, I ventured into the world for the first time in forever. I started going into the office regularly; I took in-person meetings; I met friends for drinks at actual bars; I went on dates with my wife. It was fantastic.

What didn't feel good was my wardrobe. Now that life had begun anew, I needed to look put together, or at least not like a schlub. While I was grateful to wear something more refined than my quarantine outfit—jeans, T-shirt, a pair of well-worn Vans—I was unmoved by my options. Clothes I'd once loved now reminded me of the fifteen months I'd spent not wearing them. Getting dressed was a chore. The whole thing left me feeling uneasy. And if I didn't *feel* confident, so my socially isolated brain thought, how could I *be* confident?

Then I found a brand-new suit in my closet.

(You're probably thinking, *How big is that closet?* Not that big!)

In January of last year, I got the suit, a navy-blue linen two-piece by Brunello Cucinelli, and promptly placed it in a garment bag. Then the pandemic hit, and in August my family moved from an apartment in New York to a house in New Jersey; the garment bag ended up tucked away in the back of my closet. Rediscovering it this past spring felt like stumbling upon El Dorado.

I don't want to oversell the redemptive power of clothes, but damn, when I put that thing on for the first time, it was as if I'd just donned (very soft, very breathable) armor. I felt . . . better. Renewed. So the next day, I pulled out another unworn item, a light-brown double-breasted blazer from Suitsupply I'd bought at a virtual supersale during the depths of the pandemic. Same feeling—confidence, maybe with a dash of peacock. Be prepared: You will turn heads in a suit or blazer—*where is that guy going?*—precisely because few people have to dress up right now. That's all it took to set me on a path toward overhauling my closet.

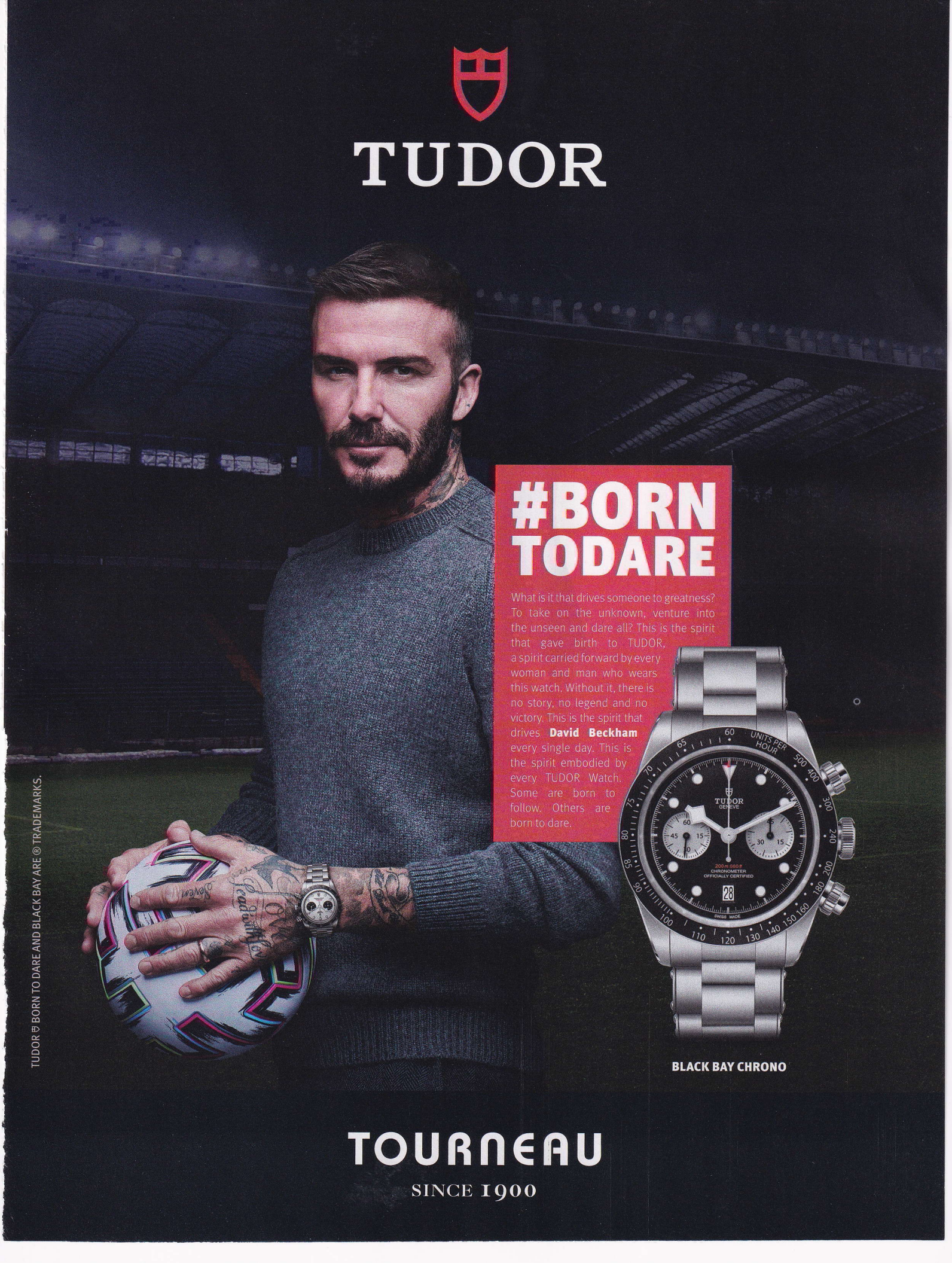
Build back better, as they say.

Welcome to the Great Reset. Maybe you're heading to your first postpandemic wedding, or you really want to show off the gains you made from a quarantine spent on a Peloton. As we return to real life, there's no better time to reconsider what's in your closet. That's one of the driving forces behind the fashion stories in this issue: what to wear as you reengage with the world. You'll see a lot of fall-friendly suits—"Rebel Rebel . . ." has ten pages' worth—and even a few ties. I'm not suggesting your own reset must involve a suit—on page 48, Esquire style director Jonathan Evans endorses 18 East, a deeply casual brand he believes is perfect for the moment—but I can say from experience that there's something fortifying about slipping into perfectly fitted pants and a jacket.

I'm not alone. It's boom times for bespoke menswear brands. Kirsten and Zach Uttich, owners of the six-year-old custom-clothing shop BLVDier, in Chicago, said they had their busiest day yet over the summer. On a sweltering afternoon in July, fifteen guys came into the store clamoring for something tailored: tuxedos, sport coats, pants, and, of course, suits. "The materials and styles have changed," Zach explained to me in between back-to-back appointments, "but suits are still a part of the conversation—maybe more so now than ever." I'm told that Brooklyn Tailors, another shop founded by a married couple, Brenna and Daniel Lewis, is jammed up into the fall. As Zach said, men "want to get rid of the clothes they've been staring at for the last year." Amen.

You don't need to open a new line of credit to take part in the Great Reset. At places like BLVDier, you can get a custom-made suit for less than a thousand bucks. Good off-the-rack options are even less, and widely available. But if you do feel like splurging to make a big statement, consider the leather Gucci suit Owen Wilson is wearing on the cover. And keep in mind our timeless suit-buying advice from *Esquire Etiquette: The Modern Man's Guide to Good Form*, published in 1987: "Buy as many as you can afford and then buy one more." After surviving the past year and a half—and no matter what is to come—you deserve it. **—Michael Sebastian**

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALLIE HOLLOWAY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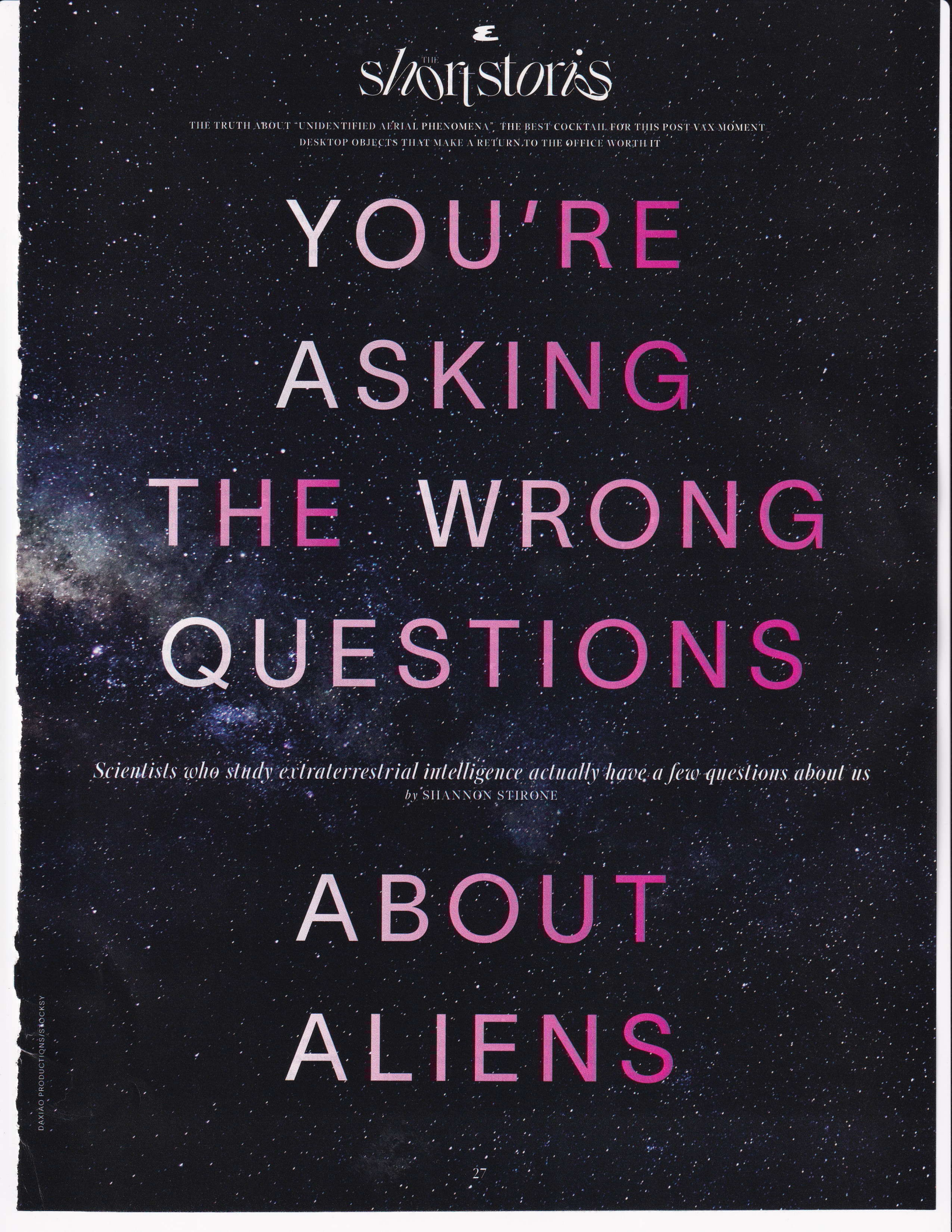
YOU'RE ASKING THE WRONG QUESTIONS ABOUT ALIENS

Scientists who study extraterrestrial intelligence actually have a few questions about us

by SHANNON STIRONE



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COMMANDER DAVID FRAVOR of the U.S. Navy was behind the controls of a fighter jet over the Pacific Ocean in 2004 when he spotted something weird. It hovered over the water, churning it so forcefully that it appeared to be boiling. Moments later, the object accelerated away from him at a shocking speed. In 2015, another Navy pilot spied a fast-moving object at low altitude over the Atlantic. "What the fuck is that thing?" he radioed, a sentiment that basically everyone who heard about the two incidents shared.

What the fuck is that thing?

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING, IT'S VERY UNLIKELY THAT WE ARE ALONE.

We've been wondering pretty much exactly that for as long as humans have walked the earth, searching for meaning and connection in the skies above us. But it's lately reached a fever pitch, an almost wishful fervor. You might even say we've become obsessed.

Early this summer, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released its long-awaited report on the topic of "What the fuck is that thing?" But it didn't do much to explain away the UFOs that the Navy pilots encountered back in 2004 and 2015—or any of the 144 accounts the report took up. Here were the broad strokes: 1) The ODNI wants us to stop calling them UFOs and start calling them UAPs, or unidentified aerial phenomena, and 2) Those weren't aliens. But if anyone thought the ODNI report would end speculation, boy, were they wrong. If anything, it just got us all wondering even harder: Are we alone in the cosmic void? Put more bluntly: Are aliens real?

Good luck getting a scientist to answer that for you with a yes or no. Claire Isabel Webb, a historian and anthropologist of science and a fellow at the Berggruen Institute, for example, answered like this: "Based on what we know about earth's biochemistry and the profusion of life here, the deluge of exoplanet detection in the last three decades that tells us that most stars have planets, and a new understanding of 'weird' life-forms on earth that hints to all kinds of exotic life-forms beyond it, scientists now think it is very probable that extraterrestrial life exists elsewhere in the universe, perhaps even in our local solar system."

Translation, we think: Yeah, there are probably aliens out there.

Whether this is news that fills you with dread or hope, it almost certainly conjures an image. Out of our timeless, cosmic loneliness, we've generated hosts of guesses about aliens: gray creatures with large black eyes; beings with long, tendril-like fingers; or ominous yet tender, intelligent entities. We've come up with generous creatures sharing the advanced knowledge of a wiser and kinder civilization. From *The Twilight Zone* to *Arrival*, these giving, selfless beings willing to save us are our best hope. There are also the evil ones, lacking in empathy, ready to colonize and to kill. However we imagine fellow sentient life, it usually shows up as some metaphor for humans as we know ourselves. This is actually more key to the search for extraterrestrial life than we might think.

Humans are on the lookout for intelligent life that feels familiar to us—that has some recognizable traits. Webb points out that the word *alien* simply means stranger. "It implies someone who is knowable but not known," she says. We don't just want to find alien life; we want to find someone we can have a conversation with, perhaps even someone who can help us. Maybe our renewed itch for neighbors comes at a time when we are longing to be saved, not just from the fate of human life but from ourselves. As I wrote this essay, two billionaires found earth so unsatisfactory that they launched themselves off the planet, and forest fires burned 400,000 acres of wilderness in Oregon, producing a haze that traveled all the way to New York City, blurring out the sun.

So perhaps a better question than whether we're alone is what would make us feel less alone. Would confirmation of the existence of little green men do it? If we found a planet covered in whales or ladybugs or a planet that had only trees and birdlike creatures, would that? "I don't think any of those things is really going to give us the satisfaction that we get in a sci-fi film," says Jason Wright, a professor of astronomy and astrophysics and the director of the Penn State Extraterrestrial Intelligence Center. Even in the 1997 Jodie Foster movie *Contact*, the film's aliens disguise themselves in human form to make their meet and greet less terrifying.

What if we can't recognize aliens? What if they aren't even "beings" the way we think of them? What if we detect a signal from an artificially intelligent robot designed to continuously send out radio waves in all directions? Would we feel contacted? Would we even identify it as intelligent, according to our definitions? Would we consider it "life" at all?

In 2016's *Arrival*, an alien species lands with a useful message that humans can understand only after overcoming their intellectual biases.

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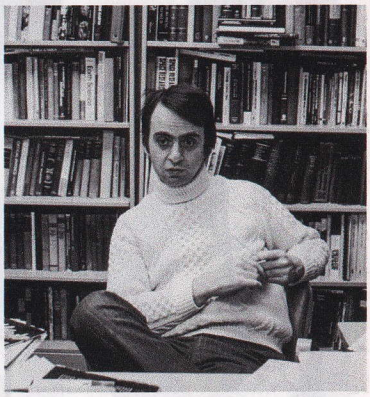
MISSION
LIFE IN COLOURS

OKAY, LET'S ASSUME WE'RE somehow able to overcome our earthly prejudices toward life that looks, acts, and uses technology in a way that's recognizable to us. We still have the not insignificant problem of finding that life. Enter the search for extraterrestrial intelligence, often abbreviated SETI. If that acronym sounds familiar, it might be from *Contact*. (In case you haven't seen it, know that it's a great flick.) In 1984, astronomer Jill Tarter (on whom Foster's character in *Contact* was based) and Thomas Pierson founded the SETI Institute, which is on the hunt for intelligent life. By that they mean life in the universe that looks like what humans would consider intelligent life. That could be just about anything, ranging from a human being to a whale. NASA briefly studied this in the '80s, but since then it has spent much of its time focused on the discovery of microorganisms, either dead or living, in our solar system. It's a worthy hunt, but we're going to set that aside here, since our species would generally have trouble considering microorganisms intelligent.



Carl Sagan. The movie *Contact* is based on his 1985 novel.

"SETI is looking specifically for technology," says Wright. "We're looking for something that can use tools . . . or send signals in some way that would be detectable at interstellar distances. It seems like kind of a tall order, except we do it all the time." He's talking about the fact that we've sent every radio strain of the Rolling Stones and Beyoncé and almost every television transmission out into space. Scientists call these electromagnetic signals "technosignatures," and they're filling our local cosmos with evidence that we are here in the form of a pretty wild playlist. Even though we haven't sent out many purposeful "Hey, we're right here!" signals directly to other stars, we've still been broadcasting our existence into space for quite a while.

Until we learn to communicate instantaneously across space-time, this is more or less the only way to get in touch with our presumed neighbors in the universe. It's entirely possible someone or something else is doing the same thing. But we'll only know if we listen.

There's another problem: Those supposed aliens might have rendered themselves extinct by the time our messages reach them. When an entire species removes itself from the evolutionary running, scientists attribute that to the Great Filter. (Climate change and devastating nuclear war are examples of this phenomenon of self-destruction.) If we found artificially intelligent life, it would also have had to survive the Great Filter. ("They would need to be programmed to not attack each other," Webb explains.) This is not something our species has mastered. To progress past the technological threshold where we can travel deeper into space or build intelligent robotic surrogates to do it in our stead, we must not just survive but become more like the savior version of the aliens we've envisioned.

Are those saviors out there? "The fact that we have no idea means we've got to look," says Wright. "We are working on it. I don't think it's going to go the way we all imagined. But really, we're just getting started." *Contact* supplies something of an answer when a girl who will grow up to be a SETI scientist and her father are discussing how far away all of the planets are. "Dad," she says, "do you think there's people on other planets?" He considers and replies, "If it is just us, seems like an awful waste of space."

The often unspoken goal of these search efforts is a greater appreciation for the preciousness of our existence. On the one hand, our cosmic loneliness can make us feel isolated and vulnerable. There are two trillion galaxies in the universe: We couldn't possibly be alone in the cosmos—could we? But on the other hand, isn't it special to think our species has evolved to be able to venture out and explore our place in the grandness of things? Surely that's something only we could ever do. The tragedy of our search for company in the cosmos is that the distances between stars mean that even if we did hear a signal, the conversation—both the interpretation of the message and the small matter of what to say back—could take decades. If it ever happens, though, it will be the most complex and most patient conversation in human history.

Until then, SETI calls it the search for a reason. Our universe is a big place, unfathomably big, and, statistically speaking, it's very unlikely that we are the only technologically advanced tool users who are asking this question: Is it just us out here? There is probably "life" all over the cosmos. But even if there is life that can harness radio waves or has evolved as we have, there's a danger that we won't be able to recognize it. The search, in other words, is not only out there but down here. The answer is nothing less than rethinking what we've assumed life is. And the stakes are high. We can laugh off our UFO—sorry, ahem, UAP—obsession or we can actually search, not just for the universe's signals but for our own. Our fears are telling us something. Our search for saviors is, too. We ought to listen.

WHAT IF WE CAN'T RECOGNIZE ALIENS? WHAT IF THEY AREN'T EVEN "BEINGS" THE WAY WE THINK OF THEM?

Jill Tarter with NASA's Larry Webster.

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2 oz Grey Goose vodka
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Shake ingredients with ice and strain into a martini glass. Garnish with two or three coffee beans.

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FROM THE EDITORS OF *Esquire*

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desktop *icons*

Now that we're back in the office, freshen up your workspace with any (or all!) of these objects BEAUTIFUL enough to double as art pieces and GUARANTEED to stop your coworkers in their tracks

by DANIEL DUMAS

1. GIRAFFA TABLE LAMP

Fluorescent lighting putting you in a dark mood? Illuminate your work area with the Giraffa, a table lamp that somehow looks even more brilliant than the light it puts out. **$290; lightology.com**

2. FIELD + SUPPLY TRIANGLE LEATHER VALET TRAY

Place all the important objects strewn about your desk into a leather valet tray like this. Or don't. It looks just as good empty as it does full. **$325; fieldandsupply.com**

3. FIELD + SUPPLY BRASS LETTER OPENER

Instead of using an old set of Fiskars, try slicing through boxes, blister packs, and the odd sandwich with something civilized, like this leather-wrapped brass blade. **$216; fieldandsupply.com**

4. DWR TABLE GREENHOUSE

Bad news: Your office plants are probably all dead. Good news: There's never been a better time for a fresh start with some new flora using this table-mounted greenhouse, where you can show (and grow) practically any herb of your choosing. **$475; dwr.com**

5. WOOD-FIRED KOHIKI CUP AND MUG BY AKIRA SATAKE

The Osaka-born, North Carolina–based Satake was a professional musician before turning to Japanese pottery. This is likely why all of his pieces are a symphony of light and color, as evidenced by these vessels made with the traditional kohiki method, using iron-rich clay. **Starting at $65; akirasatake.com**

6. HAY SPLASH VASE

This vase is created using a special handblown-glass technique that gives it a trippy swirl pattern but also ensures that no two are the same. Perfect for when Jake in accounting (goddamn, not again, Jake) copies your style. **$85; us.hay.com**

7. OSMA PRO COLD BREW COFFEE MACHINE

It's 3:00 P.M. and that lunchtime burrito is making you very sleepy. The solution? The Osma Pro, a stone-cold stunner of a cold-brew machine that can make anything from a single-shot espresso to 12 ounces of caffeinating elixir in 90 seconds flat. **$695; drinkosma.com**

8. GEO SCULPTURE 1 BY JAIME HAYON FOR FRITZ HANSEN

Sculptures don't have enough secret compartments these days. This wooden creation by Spanish artist Jaime Hayon is the exception, hiding a tiny vase under its hat, ideal for inserting a single stemmed flower. **$256; danishdesignstore.com**

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN ALSOP

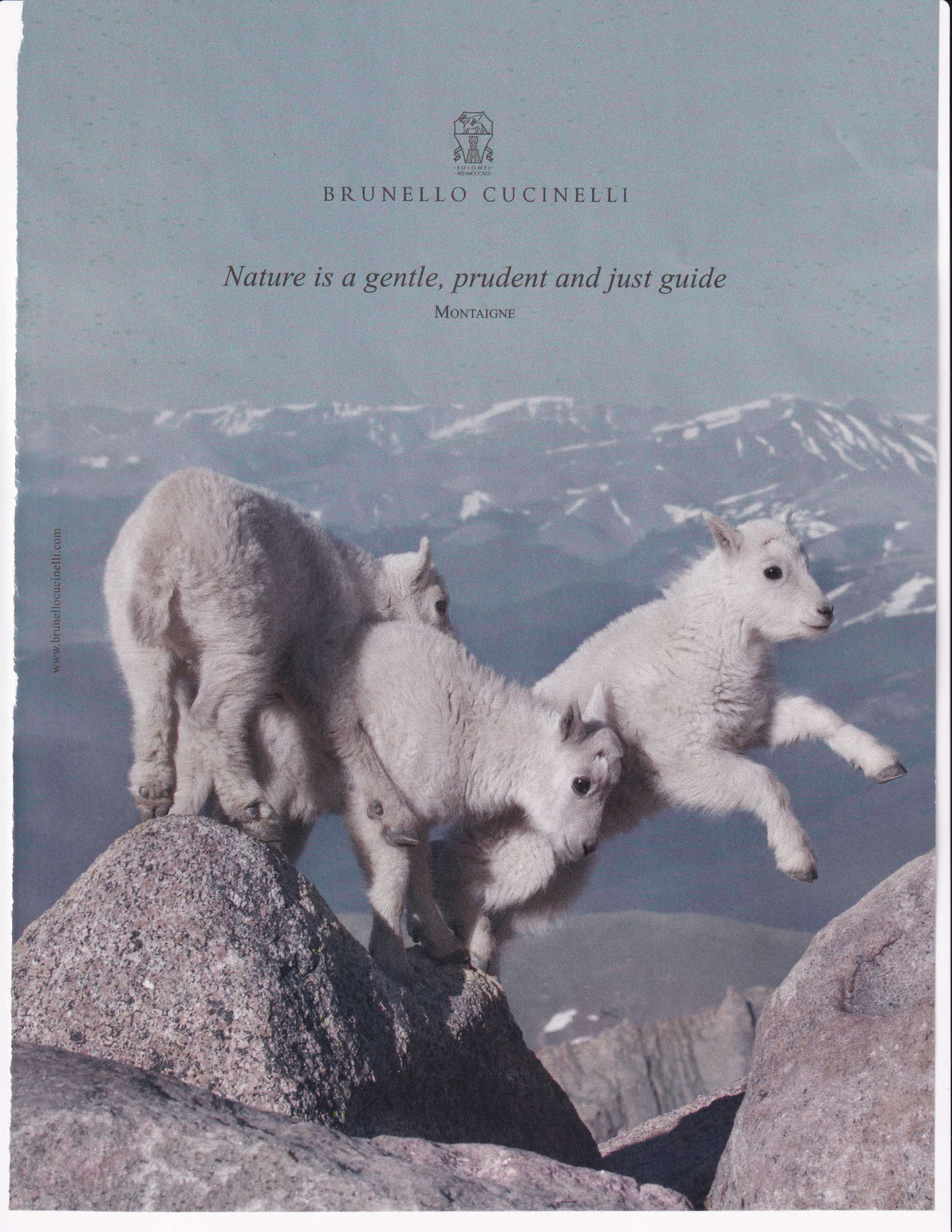
. . . BUT WHAT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO GO BACK?

If you had a midcareer crisis this past year, you're not alone. In the book *Roar*, out September 7, Michael Clinton, a longtime Hearst Magazines executive, provides a road map for anyone at a professional crossroads, urging readers to reimagine their lives before workplace disruption—like, say, a global pandemic—does it for them.

Clinton partnered with the research firm Qualtrics to survey hundreds of working adults; 40 sat down to share their inspiring stories. Through these tales of journalists turned CEOs and nurses turned coffee roasters, Clinton offers tips on running "full gallop into your future." It's never too late to shake off the nine-to-five blues and live the life you've always dreamed.

—ADRIENNE WESTENFELD

PROP STYLING: MIAKO KATOH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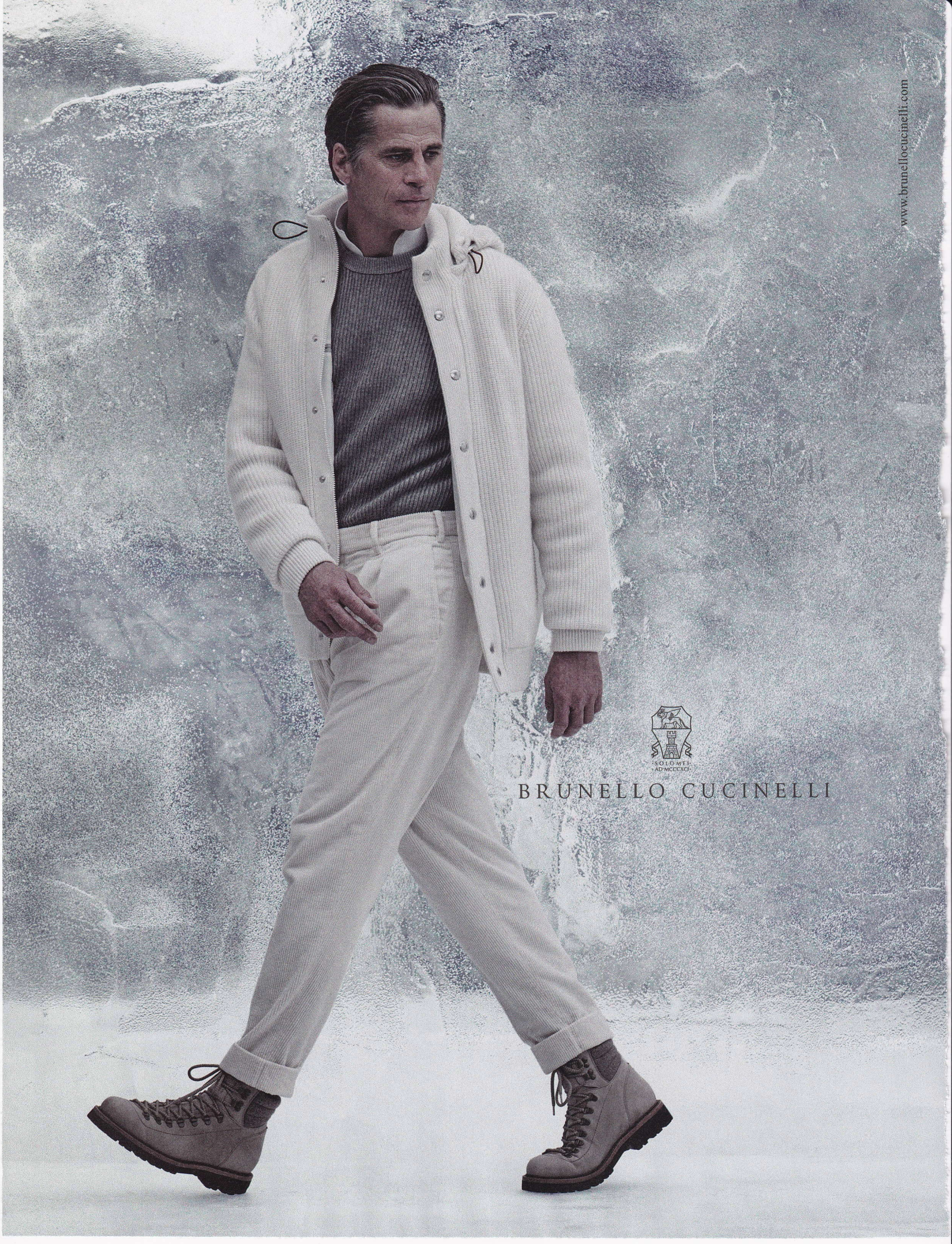
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SUBDUING MY EGO TO FLEX MY CAREER

by JOHN J. LENNON

A Swintec clear typewriter, designed for use in correctional facilities so that prisoners cannot hide contraband in its cabinet.

I COULDN'T TELL WHETHER MR. PINK HAD A KNIFE ON HIM. Usually he did. It was an afternoon in July 2020, and the sun beamed down on Sing Sing, baking the B Block yard's blacktop. By now the first wave of Covid, which had breached the prison in March and killed a guard and four prisoners, had mostly passed, and everyone was glad to be outside. I knew Mr. Pink had a beef with me. But since I'd moved to B Block several weeks earlier, he hadn't made anything of it. Jogging along the perimeter fence capped with whorled razor wire, I glanced in my periphery at him and another grimy guy seated at a metal picnic table each time I passed. They were watching me, scheming. Looking to make a move.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN ALSOP

The author, in 2018, at Sing Sing Correctional Facility in Ossining, New York.

I also knew Mr. Pink had manufactured his beef with me. A few years ago, my writing career took off, and everyone knew I was making money. Some guys were inspired, others were envious. But it was something more for Mr. Pink. (The name is a pseudonym; using his real name would violate the unwritten code of prison conduct.) I'd recently written for *Sports Illustrated*'s 2020 Super Bowl issue about prison's sports-betting culture. Around the time the issue came out, Sing Sing guards raided the cell of the guy who was holding Mr. Pink's stash–items that had nothing to do with gambling–and who happened to share the nickname of a character in my story. The guards confiscated the guy's contraband and sent him to solitary. Mr. Pink, so I'd been told, held me responsible for his losses.

I finished my jog, and as I cooled down below a basketball rim with a half-moon backboard, Mr. Pink approached with his friend close behind and handed me a torn piece of paper. On it was written a name and a dollar amount. I had three days to transfer the money to that person's account, he told me, or else we'd go "gun for gun." Translation: We'd have a knife fight. He even offered to provide my weapon if I didn't have one. So valiant, that Mr. Pink.

It didn't matter to him that all the guys I'd included in the betting piece were not from B Block, where he, his stash man, and now I lived, but from A Block, where I'd been, and where my allies still resided. It didn't matter that none of their cells had been searched. This was a poor attempt at Extortion 101–make the mark think he's done something wrong, something only his money can make right.

Of course I wasn't going to pay. But I couldn't ignore Mr. Pink. One of prison's ugliest paradoxes is that if you act violently, or even bluff violence–gesticulate and bass up your voice for what we call "the prison pump fake"–when tested, you earn more peace in the long run. Sometimes it's hard even to know you're being tested. In 2008, at Green Haven Correctional, in Stormville, I ran into a guy I knew from Brooklyn whose friend I'd killed. He told me he was not looking for payback, and I took him at his word. He sneaked me in the prison yard anyway, stabbing me six times in the chest and puncturing my lung. At least now Mr. Pink was letting me know straight up that we had a problem. He was not pump-faking. I had to do something.

I figured the next time my tier was let out into the yard before Mr. Pink's, I'd wait just past the metal detector and approach him before he could get hold of a weapon. At first I'd pretend I was going to pay up, then plant, pivot, and swing a left hook squarely into his jaw. We'd rumble; guards would run over, mace us, cuff us. We'd receive misbehavior reports, lose privileges for a month. Our beef would be politicked throughout Sing Sing. I'd probably blow the deadline for my latest story and lose cred with my editor, but I'd be abiding by the prison code and preserving my dignity.

Then I realized: That's what the old me would have done.

In 2001, at twenty-four, I killed a man on a street in Brooklyn for shaking down one of my drug dealers. I was sent up the river with a sentence of twenty-eight to life. Truth is, I grew up in the system. I'd done a year in juvy and another on Rikers Island, in a building called C-74 Adolescents at War. I'd quickly learned I had to act violently to survive. With each new beef, my fear would build until I popped. I couldn't figure another way out. None of us could. Violence in prison occurred less often than it did in juvy and jail, but when it did, it was more serious. The first time I witnessed a shanking, in the yard at Clinton Correctional, in Dannemora, the guy who did it got away. The next morning, he strutted into the mess hall beaming, and everyone greeted him as a hero.

It's hard to see that and not think, *That's what I must do to succeed in this place.* It's even harder to explain to your peers that you won't engage because doing so might compromise something more meaningful in your life than following the prison code. You'll be called weak, or worse. Who hasn't faced that dilemma, whether you're locked up or a free man, knowing what's expected of you but not wanting to abide? Who among us has not grappled with restraint, or with the fear we'll betray ourselves by making the wrong move? Most prisoners want to be known for more than the thing that landed them here, even if they don't express it–to be known as more than just a criminal. But it's hard to be vulnerable in this environment. Talk about toxic masculinity.

As I got older, I grew less impulsive and more contemplative. In 2010, while at Attica, I joined a creative-writing workshop and took to my own, on-the-ground style of prison journalism. I started cold-pitching ideas to magazines; short assignments led to longer ones and then to features in national publications. With each new piece, I engaged less with the daily ups and downs of prison's social order. My career has improved my life in all sorts of ways; it has laid the tracks for my return to the real world, one I was never a part of as a free man.

But my career has also complicated my life in prison. During a recent radio interview about my writing process, I said my edge over other journalists was my "unlimited access to colorful characters." Fellow prisoners heard it on the radio, and some were offended. Steve, a talented, published writer in his own right, reminded me that while I may see the world through scene and character, those characters are real people, and I have a responsibility to take care with how I depict them and their actions. "They're still your neighbors," Steve said. Another pal of mine, a charismatic mobster in his late fifties, advised me to "work the crowd more. Give guys some of your time." If I didn't, he said, "they're gonna look for reasons to resent you."

WHO AMONG US, WHETHER YOU'RE LOCKED UP OR A FREE MAN, HASN'T GRAPPLED WITH RESTRAINT, OR WITH THE FEAR WE'LL BETRAY OURSELVES BY MAKING THE WRONG MOVE.

He was right. I should have better worked the B Block crowd. Had I gotten out of my head and turned on my personality, Mr. Pink would have seen I had support and might never have moved on me.

I thought of nonviolent ways out of the situation. If I could get back with my allies on A Block–older guys, thinkers–they'd help de-escalate the (continued on page 124)

CHRISTAAN FELBER

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FROM THE ESQUIRE POLITICS DESK: CHARLES P. PIERCE

the phantom revolution

I HAVE LIVED THROUGH MORE THAN A FEW REVOLUTIONS. Sometime around half past Woodstock in the 1960s, revolution became a very effective marketing tool, and suddenly we were up to our Bakunins in revolutions meant to sell us things. In no particular order, I have lived through the Civil Rights Revolution, the Sexual Revolution, the Youth Revolution, the Reagan Revolution, and the Gingrich Revolution. I have lived through the Genetic Revolution and the Digital Revolution. I have lived through a couple Jesus Revolutions, and I am currently living through the Social Media Revolution. I'll let you know how that last one turns out.

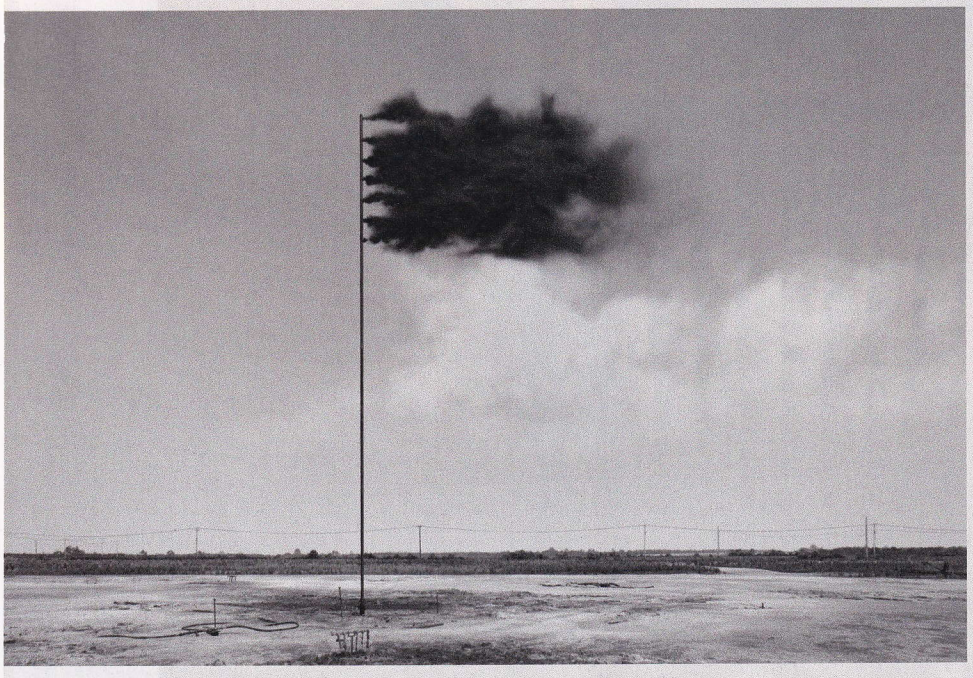
At the moment, however, and for the foreseeable future, we are also living through an extended period of what can justly be called the Phantom Revolution, in which we rebel against threats to our liberty that don't actually exist but that we create for ourselves. It is not a revolution of the mind. It's a revolution of the gut. It is not a revolution of ideas. It's a revolution of the id. We have so cheapened the idea of revolution that the emergence of this revolution manqué was inevitable. It has manifested itself in spasms over the past several decades, primarily through the development of the modern conservative mind, which has chosen a series of imaginary enemies against whom to stage a very real counterrevolutionary struggle. The Clinton Death List. The Birther Conspiracy. The Tea Party. Then four years of an administration* based on phantom policies, run by a president* who'd made his entire career out of phantom success and phantom wealth and who discharged his phantom duties with phantom competence. Donald Trump did not create the Phantom Revolution. But on his watch, the Phantom Revolution manifested itself in actual revolutionary activity, some of it violent.

On January 6, the Battle of the Phantom Election raged at the U. S. Capitol. It subsequently raged in a stadium in Arizona, where a Kabuki "audit" of the 2020 vote, engineered by the Republican majority in the state senate, encouraged the notion of the Phantom Election as something to oppose by any means necessary. The Phantom Revolution has also fought another battle of the Phantom Threat, this time against critical race theory, an area of study that was highly controversial at Harvard Law School almost 40 years ago. But through the dynamics of the Phantom Revolution, it was converted into a vast, sprawling enemy empire, dedicated to undermining the military, the law, and public schools. The battle raged at school-board meetings where activists loudly denounced the teaching of critical race theory in public primary and secondary schools. This was not something that was truly happening, except in the minds of the people who were fighting it, which was real enough for them.

Even at the height of the Tea Party hysteria, the Phantom Revolution didn't materialize the way it has since the 2020 presidential election. The assault on the U. S. Capitol seems to have frozen the national government in place. The Republican Party is paralyzed by its realization that it needs the Phantom Revolution, in all its forms, to maintain its own relevance in American politics, and the Democratic Party seems stunned into impotence in the face of the threat, and in the knowledge that the threat is genuine this time.

On June 22, the United States Senate proved itself incapable of participating in the governing of the country. In the face of nearly 400 laws proposed in 48 states, all of them designed to suppress the franchise but all of them also ordnance in the Battle of the Phantom Election, the Senate refused to discuss a federal response. Earlier, the Senate had proved itself incapable even of defending itself. It refused to discuss the idea of an independent commission to investigate the violent assault that briefly overwhelmed the government on January 6. The Senate will not confront the Phantom Revolution even when that revolution becomes quite real and arrives unbidden, right on the Senate's doorstep.

For a revolutionary nation, we've become so bad at revolutions that we find it necessary to locate imaginary oppressors against whom to rebel, many of them the most powerless people around. We saw the beginnings of something real in the summer of 2020 following the killing of George Floyd, and the country is desperately in need of revolutionary change—to face the climate crisis, to rebuild itself, to address challenges undreamed of only a decade ago, to adjust its 18th-century government to the needs of the 21st, and, dammit, to run its elections in a sensible way. We should be better at all this than we are.



COURTESY THE ARTIST (JOHN GERRARD), THOMAS DANE GALLERY, LONDON, AND PACE GALLERY, NEW YORK

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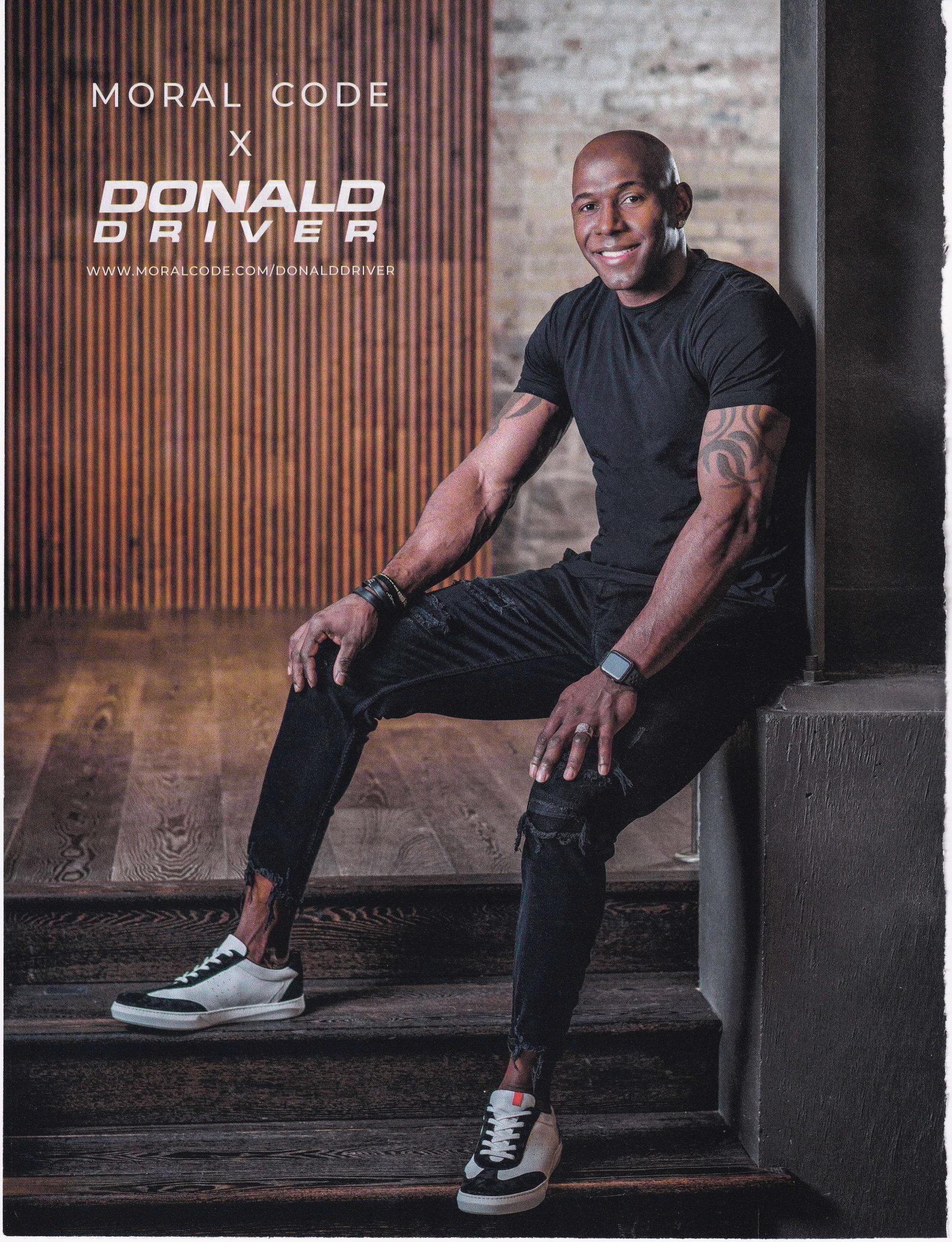
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Star Player

The varsity jacket is all grown up, and it deserves a starting spot in your fall lineup

BY JONATHAN EVANS

VARSITY JACKET ($550) BY **THE BROOKLYN CIRCUS.**

USED TO BE, a varsity jacket was what you pulled over your shoulders after scoring the game-winning point against East. That was then. Re-invigorated over the past decade or so by high-fashion houses like Saint Laurent and indie labels like the Brooklyn Circus, it's now the jacket of cool-guy rockers, streetwear savants, and, this fall, you. Wear yours with everything from scuffed boots and faded denim to tailored trousers and pin-sharp dress shoes. Layer it over a sweater vest (see page 54) or throw it on with track pants and sneakers if you want to lean into the athletic associations. However you choose to wear it, the varsity is a bona fide icon of American cool that should have a spot in your wardrobe. Buzzer-beaters very much not required.

PROP STYLING: JUSTIN MAJETICH

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALLIE HOLLOWAY

Antonio Ciongoli in the 18 East shop. The space also serves as the brand's headquarters.

Just Right for right Now

The deeply casual but deeply considered clothes of 18 East and its founder, Antonio Ciongoli, offer a stylish answer to the question of how to dress for this moment

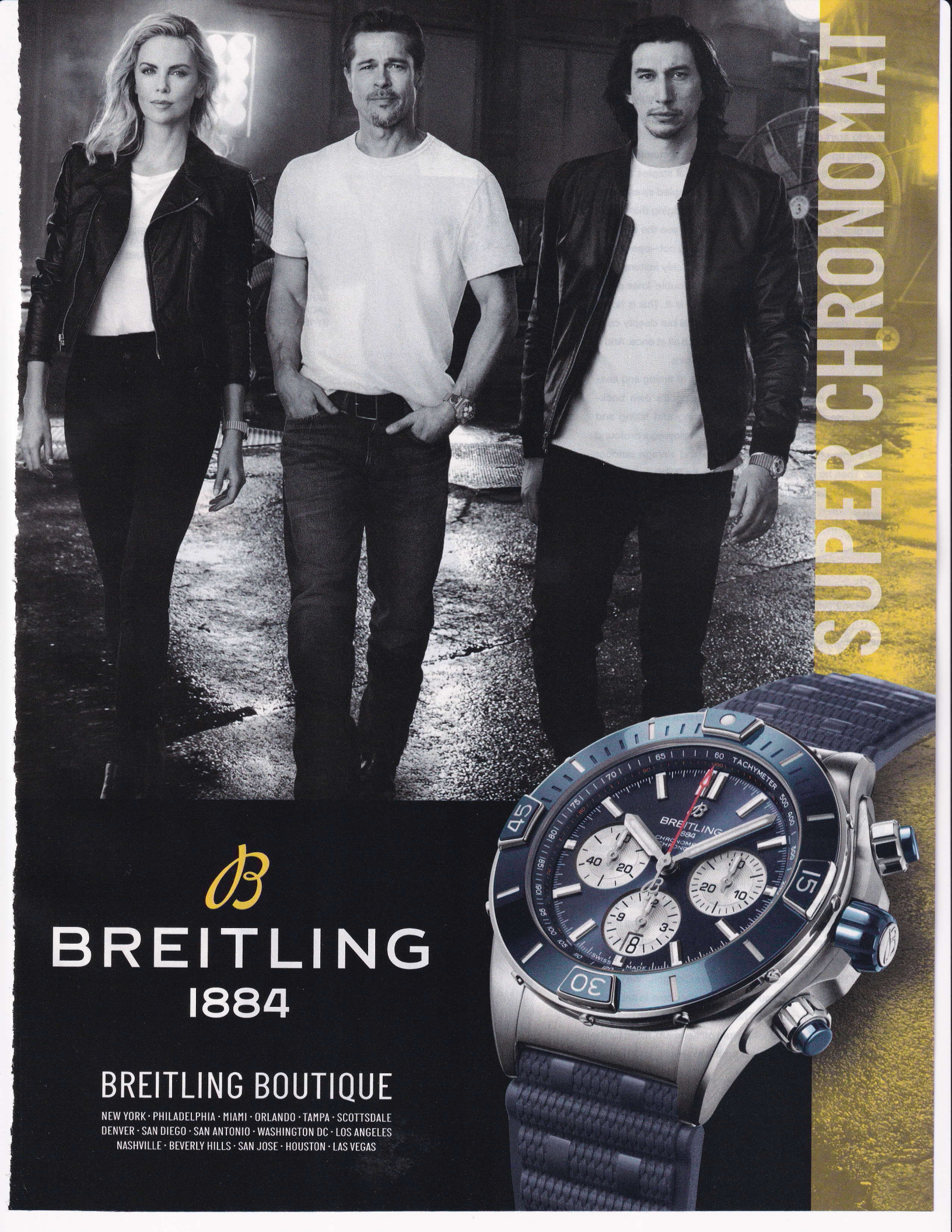
BY JONATHAN EVANS

TO UNDERSTAND THE SUCCESS OF 18 EAST—one of the most in-demand brands for in-the-know style guys—you have to talk about the benches. They sit outside the shop-slash-company-HQ at 146 Elizabeth Street in downtown New York City. "If you walk to that neighborhood and turn the corner down Elizabeth Street off Kenmare, you hear wheels rolling," says Antonio Ciongoli, the 37-year-old designer who founded the brand in 2017. "At any given time, there are about four or five guys out in front of the store skating the benches. There's always good music playing. It's just a really, really good vibe."

Inside the store, the good vibe keeps on coming. And once you realize what it means, it gets even better. Because it's not just about

GROOMING: KOJI ICHIKAWA AT THE CLUB NEW YORK USING LAICALE

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL DORSA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empty positivity; it's also about finding a solution to one of the most pressing personal-style conundrums we are all facing now. This moment in menswear is seemingly torn in two directions. We're exhausted by ratty loungewear and want to start properly Getting Dressed again, but the idea of giving up the comfort we've become accustomed to and returning to the same old business-casual staples sounds just as unappealing as retrieving your crumpled sweatpants from the pile of clothes next to the bed. Bridging that divide feels dicey, if not impossible. But then you see the sublime, sometimes strange stuff 18 East is churning out—open-front sahasika jackets, baggy cargo pants in a richly textured 3-D jacquard fabric, tweedy camp shirts and double-knee pants and fuzzy fleeces—and you realize, *This is it. This is how I want to dress right now.* It's deeply casual but deeply considered. Anti–office drone and anti-schlub all at once. And it is perfectly attuned to our current conditions.

That stroke of luck, that convergence of timing and aesthetics, has everything to do with Ciongoli's own background. He grew up in Vermont, skating and hiking and hanging out on the lake, all the while developing a profound and abiding love of '90s skate style and vintage outdoor gear. Then he cut his teeth designing for Ralph Lauren and Gant by Michael Bastian before cofounding Eidos—an Italian label devoted to making the kind of office-friendly clothes upwardly mobile young men would wear to stunt on their less elegantly suited colleagues—in 2013. It was, according to Ciongoli, "a complete and utter failure for five years."

So he came up with a solution: "Everything I did with this one brand, let's do exactly the opposite." Instead of targeting department stores, sell the clothes directly to the customer. Instead of producing in Italy, make the bulk of them in Bagru, India, with a third-generation manufacturer that blew Ciongoli's mind when he encountered it during his time at Eidos. ("I'd never seen that much handwork before, and I was so inspired by how slow and lo-fi the whole thing was—how irregular and special.") And instead of trying to appeal to a suit-and-tie guy, create casual clothes that are "actively not for work" and directly influenced by skateboarding and the outdoors.

It paid off. Log on to 18 East's website (18east.co) for one of the Thursday drops and you can watch in real time as product after product quickly disappears. It's a scrum, with shoppers snapping up anything that they can still add to their cart. "If everything works the way it's supposed to," says Ciongoli, "things are gone within a couple hours." Online sales make up the majority of 18 East's business, and that feeding frenzy is part of the reason the brand grew by 227 percent in 2020.

But back on Elizabeth Street, at 18 East HQ, it's a different story. "There's, like, no rush at all," says Ciongoli. "We're on a very quiet block, and you can very easily come in and hang out for a while, try stuff on. The store almost always has what you're looking for." Just take a turn off Kenmare, listen for the sound of skateboard wheels on the sidewalk, and keep an eye out for the benches.

GORECKI CARGO PANTS ($298) BY **18 EAST.**

SAHASIKA JACKET ($226) BY **18 EAST.**

THERMAL T-SHIRT ($105) BY **18 EAST X STANDARD ISSUE.**

COWICHAN SWEATER ($495) BY **18 EAST X KANATA.**

WALLY BOOTS ($235) BY **18 EAST X PADMORE & BARNES.**

DOUBLE-KNEE PANTS ($145) BY **18 EAST.**

SHIRT JACKET ($185) BY **18 EAST.**

PRODUCT IMAGES: DANIELLE DALY; STYLING: MIAKO KATOH.

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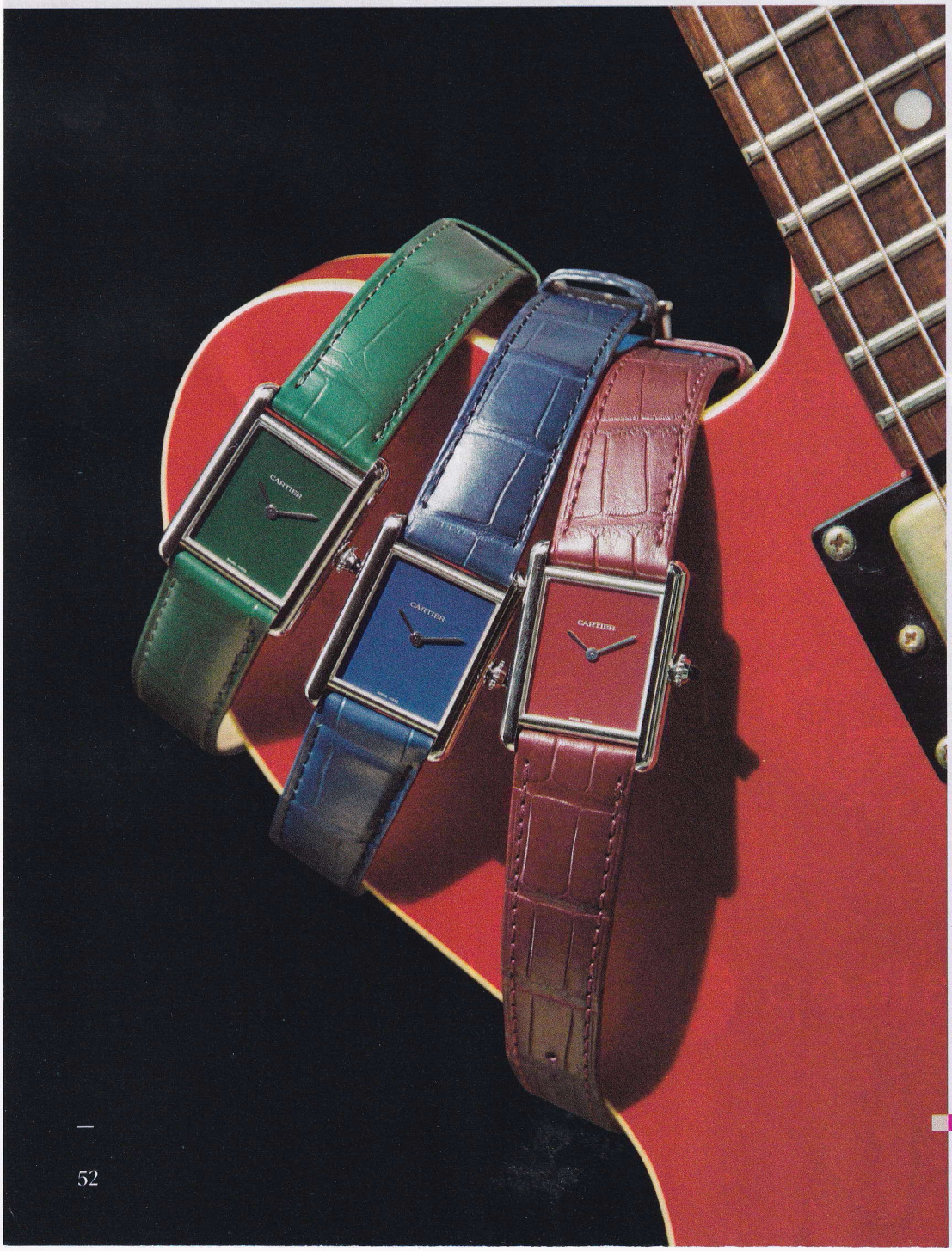
A New Riff on an Old favOrite

The Tank Must series offers up classic design, bold colors, and a smaller price tag than you'd expect

BY NICK SULLIVAN



AS A HOUSEHOLD NAME, Cartier has mass *and* snob appeal. It's unself-consciously fancy and reassuringly expensive, with a back catalog of watches that climb into the $100,000 range—enough to make even the most out-of-touch trust-funder blush. At the same time, it's mindful of the broader market of folks who simply can't shell out that much. And as it edges toward its bicentenary (it was founded in 1847), Cartier is making moves that are both modern and surprisingly accessible.

The Tank Must series, which hits stores this month, is a new riff on the Cartier Tank that nods to a popular generation of watches introduced in the late 1970s. "Les Must" is French slang for fun things, trendy things, things you just *have* to have, and "Must de Cartier" is a catchall name once used for entry-level Cartier products designed to coax younger people in the door. It worked across a range of categories, but it's the watches that are remembered. They were a little offbeat, a little funky, but still rooted in beautiful design. The combo of timeless style and timely updates was a hit in the '80s, and it's equally effective today, now that we're all excited about getting dressed again. And as the rules of getting dressed have flown out the window, the classic-but-not-quite vibe feels especially on point.

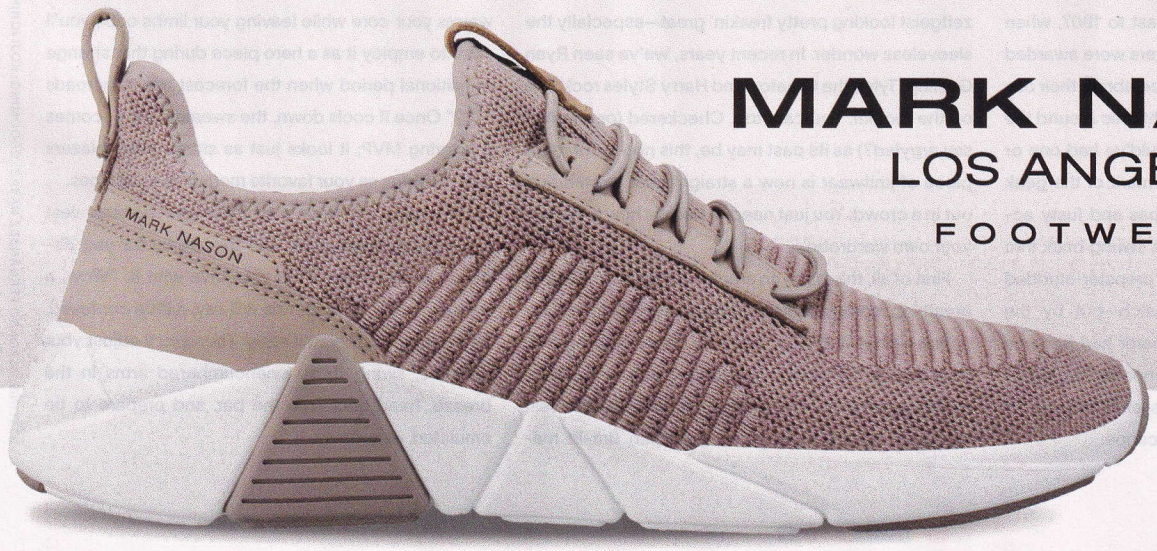
Most eye-catching from the lineup is the trifecta of burgundy, green, and blue quartz-driven watches with steel cases that were the subject of much debate (over preferred color) at Esquire. That's not all, however. A solar-powered version will run for 16 years so long as it sees the sun from time to time, and it features an eco-conscious strap made from 40 percent apple scraps. It's a bit weird, sure. But it's also aligned with the moment and informed by the values of increasingly conscientious shoppers. In other words: Like the series as a whole, it's just right for right now. Oh, and as for the winner of the color debate, I've decided on blue. Probably.

TANK MUST WATCH ($2,860 EACH) BY **CARTIER.**

PROP STYLING: JUSTIN MAJETICH

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALLIE HOLLOWAY

MODERN MINIMALIST



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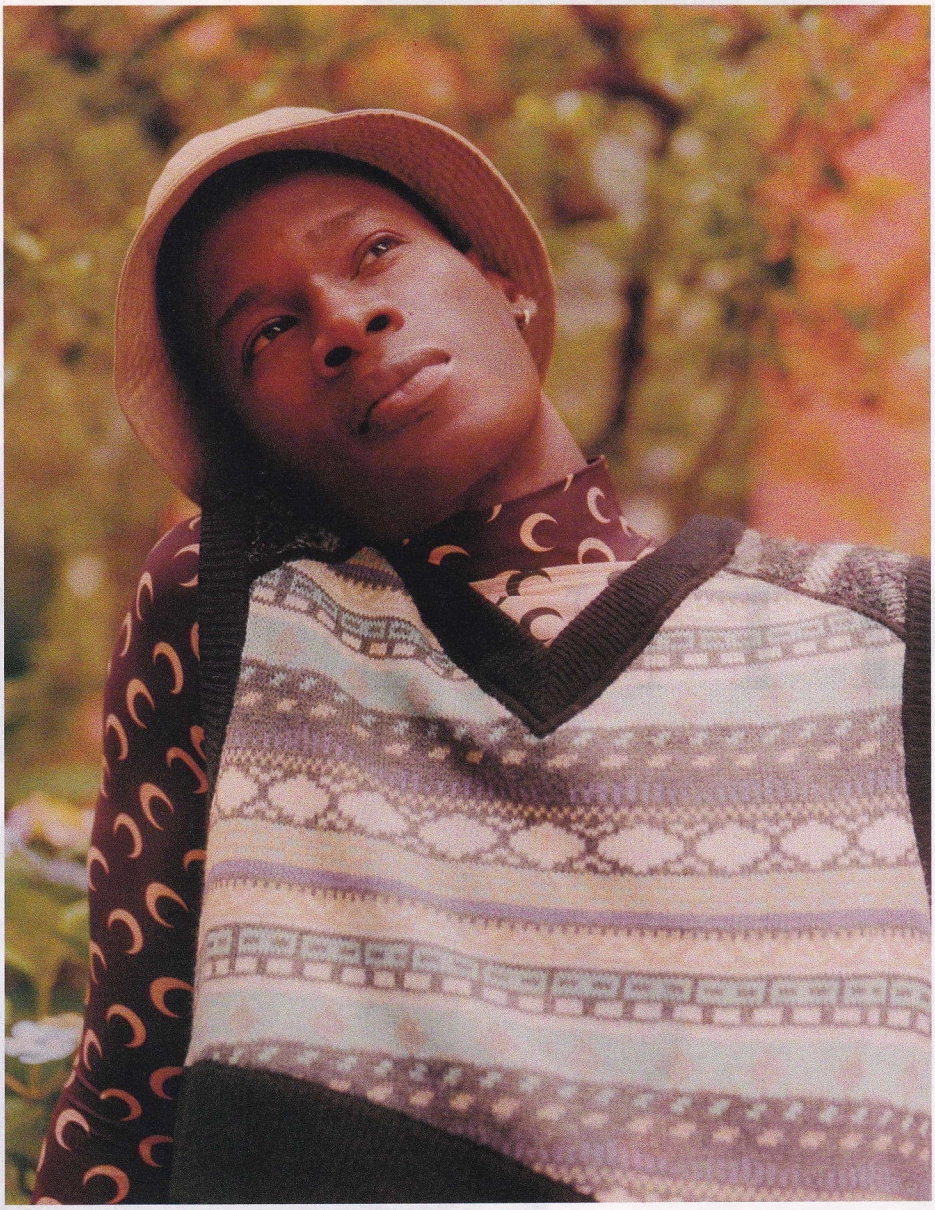
The Sweater Vest Is Cool Again

But potential pitfalls abound. Here's how to avoid them.

BY BEN BOSKOVICH



SWEATER VEST ($820), TURTLENECK ($390), AND HAT ($350) BY **MARINE SERRE.**

IN THE PANTHEON of *can I pull it off?* the sweater vest is especially perplexing. "What is this for?" we ask as we stare at the enigmatic, sleeveless wonder once considered fuddy-duddy even for the most classics-professor-ish classics professor. It wasn't always so—in fact, the sweater vest was once the province of jocks.

In menswear, it dates back at least to 1907, when University of Michigan football players were awarded versions with an embroidered *M* to celebrate their on-field achievements. It was downright chic around the jazz age—certainly Jay Gatsby would've had one or five in his closet—but became the mark of the geek by midcentury, adopted by grandpas and fusty academics. Since then it has at times swung back into fashion—the Ralph Lauren–clad, prepster-studded '80s were a particularly good patch—but by the early 21st century the standard-bearer had become none other than Rick Santorum. Generally, like short-sleeved button-downs and tortoiseshell glasses, it was planted firmly in the nerd style canon.

Though the sweater vest trailed those other two by a few years, all three have come smashing into the zeitgeist looking pretty freakin' great—especially the sleeveless wonder. In recent years, we've seen Ryan Gosling; Tyler, the Creator; and Harry Styles rock one on the regular. You can, too. Checkered (or should I say *argyled*?) as its past may be, this not-so-humble piece of knitwear is now a straight shot to standing out in a crowd. You just need to decide how it fits into your own wardrobe.

First of all, this is not an arena in which to fear a little breathing room. Letting it hang loose is crucial in mitigating all that stuffiness. We're no longer layering with repp ties and flat-front chinos tailor-made for the Class of '83 Alumni Bash. These days, the best sweater-vest deployments are more skate god than Brit-lit major. This means pairing yours with slouchy trousers, bucket hats, and well-worn sneakers. And since it warms your core while leaving your limbs cool, you'll want to employ it as a hero piece during that strange transitional period when the forecast basically reads "???" Once it cools down, the sweater vest becomes a layering MVP; it looks just as sharp under blazers and bombers as your favorite merino sweater does.

Ultimately, the goal is to treat your sweater vest like a playground. How well this works for you depends on how much fun you have with it. "Wow, a sweater vest," your friends will say, a little confused. "A sweater vest," you'll reply. Then you'll adjust your neckline, swing those unencumbered arms in the breeze, head back into the bar, and prepare to be emulated, eventually.

STYLING: ALFONSO FERNÁNDEZ NAVAS. GROOMING: KOJI ICHIKAWA/THE CLUB NEW YORK USING LAICALE.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDY JACKSON

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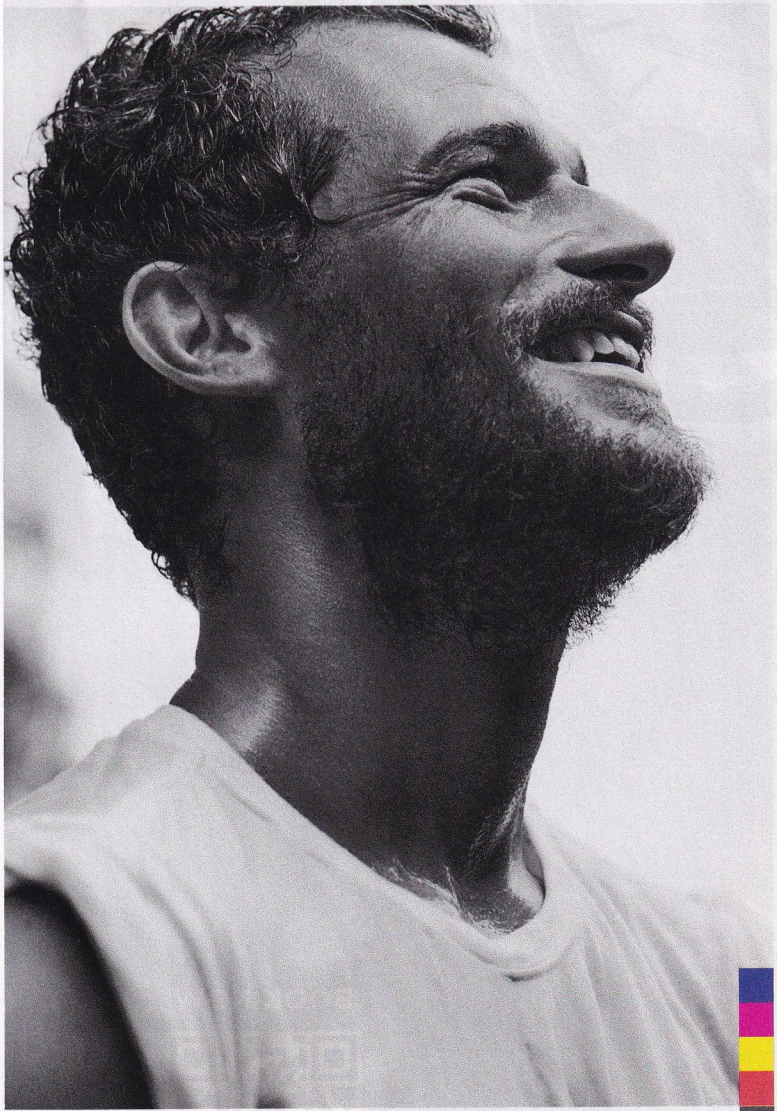
How to Be a beard Guy

So you grew some facial hair. You're not going to just leave it like that, are you?



The experiment was fun while it lasted, but now that the world is open again, there's something, well, kinda fuckin' tragic about your face looking like Grizzly Adams's Chia Pet. Sorry, man. It's time to start taking care of that beard. Fortunately, the process isn't as intimidating as you might think. Just make like Mr. Adams and sharpen your knife, gaze at your reflection in the still waters of a mountain lake, and get to work. Or simply follow along with our instructions and wind up looking 272 percent better than a hermit who hangs out with bears all day. Your call. —GARRETT MUNCE

Beard Care 101

Whether you're new to the beard game or just need a refresher, these are the basics.

FOR GOD'S SAKE, WASH YOUR BEARD

Think of a beard wash as part shampoo (for the hair) and part face wash (for the skin underneath). Use one every day to keep your whiskers clean, shiny, and food-particle-free.

BRUSH IT OUT

Use a boar-bristle brush to detangle and smooth the hair after you wash it and always before trimming. Even if you brush it dry, it will help make the areas that need to be trimmed more noticeable. (Plus, it helps distribute the natural oils.)

TRIM WITH THE RIGHT TOOLS

When using a beard trimmer, always start with a longer guard and work your way down to your desired length. (Cutting it shorter on the sides will help lengthen and slim your face.) Then use scissors to gently trim any flyaways that fall out of the overall shape.

STYLE IT UP

Beard oil hydrates your whiskers to keep them from getting wiry and prevents the skin underneath from drying out. Really massage it in so the oil covers your bristles and the skin on your chin. And if you want more control over the shape, swap the oil for a beard balm. It's like pomade for your facial hair. Oh, and make sure you like the scent. It's going to be sitting on your face all day.

Pro-Level Beard Hacks

Celebrity groomer Jessica Ortiz has had her hands on the best beards in the biz. These are her secrets for A-list facial hair.

TRIM WITH THE GRAIN

There's nothing like a sharp-edged barber cut, but if you're looking for a longer beard with a more natural vibe, Ortiz recommends following the grain of your hair as you trim: "It maintains length and keeps it nice and soft."

EDGE WITH A T-LINER

A T-liner is how pros get perfect neck and cheek lines. Use one that has an adjustable blade; when it's set at "zero gap," you'll get a fresh, crisp line. When it's adjusted to a slightly longer length, you'll achieve a more natural look.

PAY CAREFUL ATTENTION TO YOUR MUSTACHE

Whiskers should be trimmed so they hit just at the lip line. Ortiz holds a T-liner vertically and uses the corner to gently trim from the center of the lip to the corner. "You can create a softer edge on the lip instead of holding it flat and creating a straight line," she says. While you're at it, trim your nose hairs to keep things tidy.

BUST BREAKOUTS

Often, pimples and bumps underneath a beard aren't acne—they're ingrown hairs. Ortiz recommends dabbing on Bevel 2-in-1 Spot Fader to gently release the hair underneath the bump without gunking up your beard.

BLEND AWAY GRAY

There's no shame in having a little salt in the pepper of your beard, but if you're not ready to let your inner silver fox run free, you can even it out. "Delicately brush Color Wow Root Cover Up onto gray or white hair and it will color it without coloring the skin around it," Ortiz says.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN BALSOM

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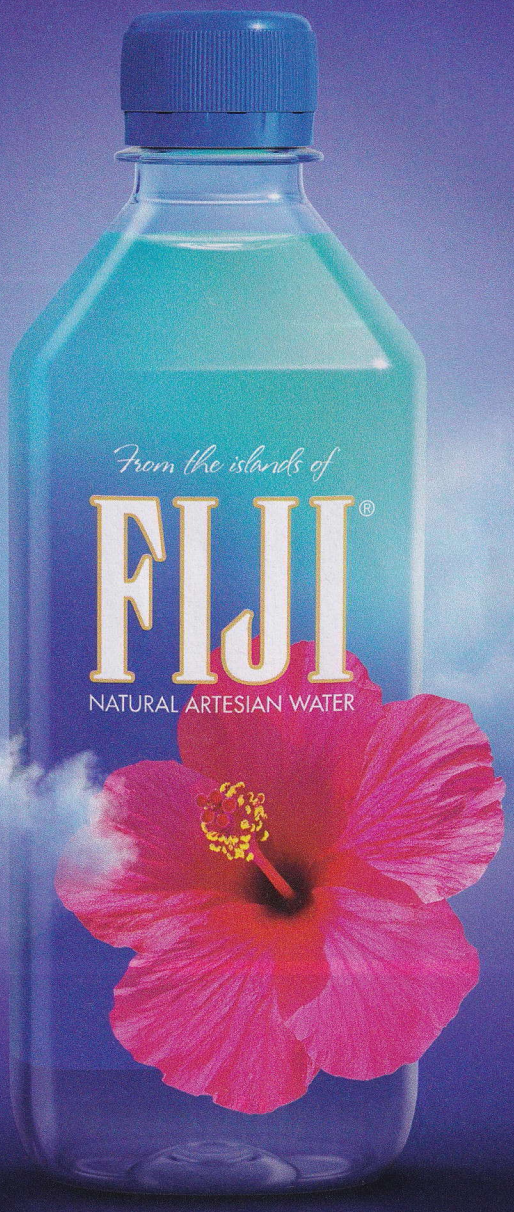

FIJIWater.com

*Compared to the other two top premium bottled water brands.

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IT'S TIME TO... REALLY START DRESSIN'

For a while there, putting on clothes felt pointless. We dressed for screens, pets, maybe partners, but not much else. We stopped trying. Now it's time to try again. And dammit, we're going to win—by achieving that exceptional feeling you get when you size yourself up in the mirror and know what you're wearing is going to hold up functionally, shine in the eyes of those who see you, and make you feel confident and whole. We're back.

IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES, WE OFFER **THREE WAYS** TO PREPARE FOR THE RETURN TO REAL LIFE. CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE (& MAYBE EVEN MIX AND MATCH).

SUIT UP LIKE A STYLE REBEL

EVERYONE IS A DISRUPTER THESE DAYS, EXPRESSING their maverick selves by undercutting style rules that, let's face it, no one actually cares about anymore. But if disruption is a rebellion against norms, there is one perhaps surprising way to out-disrupt everyone right now: Put on a suit. And a tie. Not just any suit, of course. And not just any tie. You don't want to be confused with your city comptroller.

Look for sharper cuts, higher waists, and even a structured shoulder. Pair them with dress shirts with taller collars, slim belts, and sharp ankle boots with a definite heel. This isn't the soft, millennial Italian vibe you remember from a decade ago. There's a harder edge to it—think eighties Anglo-French style or thirty-something Bryan Ferry in a suit—and it has never been so right. The icing on the cake here is the tie. Knot it high and tight in a four-in-hand and jink it very slightly left or right so it looks kind of wrong, like you didn't really think about it.

As for where to wear it? Well, everywhere. No one in their right mind has missed sitting at a desk, but getting complimented by your coworkers sure is nice. And returning to work is less about what you do when you get there than the ancillary stuff that you do around it. A lunch. After-work drinks. Business travel or maybe the midweek late-night bender. Even the commute is more likely to affect our choices than the actual hours spent in the office. Let's not forget all those other things—parties, weddings, and the like—that fell by the wayside for a while. For all of these things and more, wear a suit. And make it sharp.

It's the polar opposite of the clothes (and the mind fog) we've slouched around in for the past eighteen months. It is not for the weakhearted, because it requires effort and investment to pull off. It all comes down to whether you're up for it, whether you think that being seen going the extra mile—making an effort—is sexy. We say it is.

GROOMING: JOHN RUIDANT/R+CO

SUIT ($1,370), SHIRT ($220), AND TIE ($138) BY **HUSBANDS;** BOOTS ($1,195) BY **CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN.**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALLIE HOLLOWAY STYLING BY ALFONSO FERNÁNDEZ NAVAS

INTRODUCING

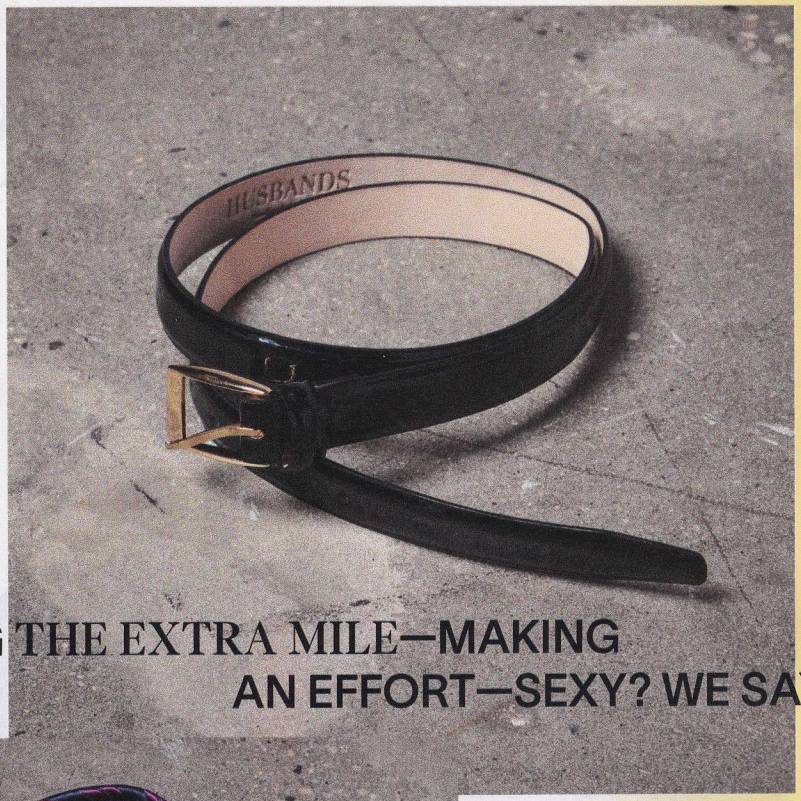
Bespoke Post x ESQUIRE

Issue One

We teamed up with the fine folks over at Bespoke Post on an exclusive collection of premium goods to equip you handsomely for anything the day might hold. It includes:

The Microblade, by **WESN** / Your new do-anything bandanna, by **Wren** /
Something to bring a little life to your booze, by **Aged & Infused** + three more everyday essentials

GET YOURS STARTING AUGUST 13 AT **BESPOKEPOST.COM/ESQUIRE**



THE BELT

Assuming your trousers fit (they do, right?) a dress belt isn't there to hold them up. It's there to add a little extra refinement. But finding a good one is harder than you might think. The trick is to go small. Make it narrow, with a hint of polish.

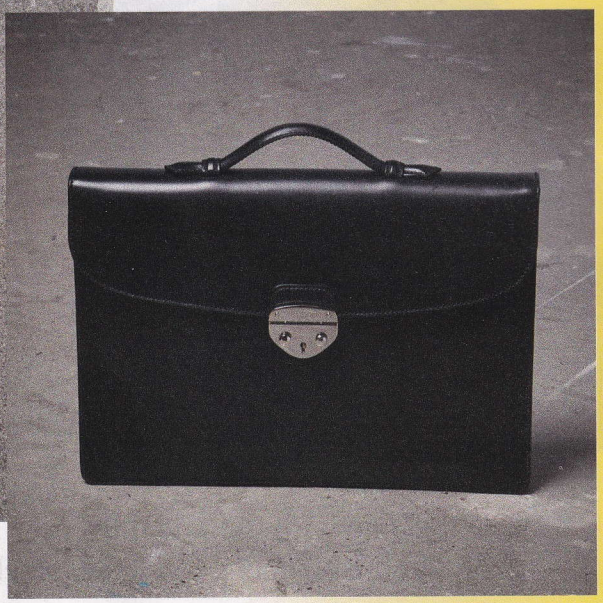
BELT ($207) BY **HUSBANDS.**

IS BEING SEEN GOING THE EXTRA MILE—MAKING AN EFFORT—SEXY? WE SAY IT IS.

THE TIE

A tie doesn't actually *do* anything. It's all form, no function. And that's what makes knotting one up such a strong move. It's a signal that you care enough to put in the effort—even when you don't have to.

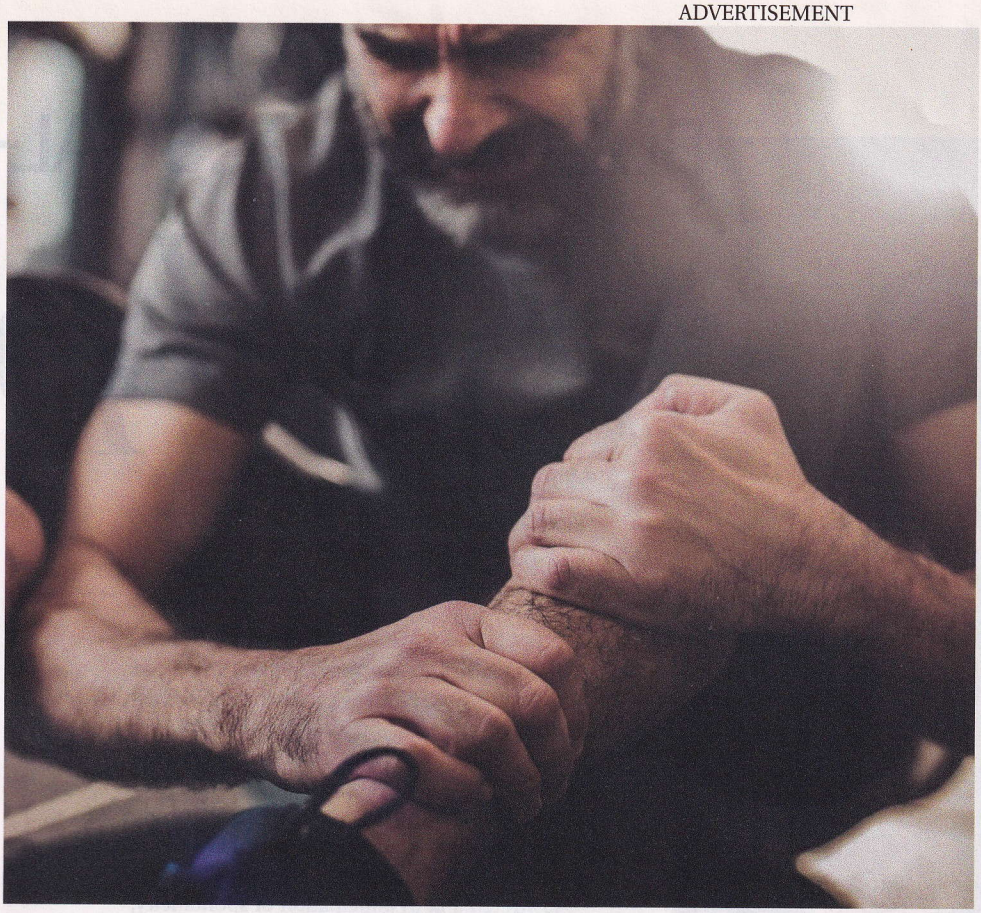
TIE ($250) BY **CHARVET.**



THE BRIEFCASE

A sleek, old-school briefcase like this is functional and protects your stuff. It's also a deliberately far cry from a backpack. You're suiting up, not heading to class. Your bag should look the part.

BRIEFCASE ($2,850) BY **ASPREY.**



CBD FOR YOUR PAIN

EVERYONE FEELS THE HURT AS YOU AGE, BUT CBD CAN HELP YOU DEAL WITH IT.

Life really does fly by. Before I knew it, my 40s had arrived, and with them came some new gifts from dear ol' Mother Nature—frequent knee pain, stress, low energy and sleeplessness. Now, I'm a realist about these things, I knew I wasn't going to be young and resilient forever. But still, with "middle-age" nearly on my doorstep, I couldn't help but feel a little disheartened. That is until I found my own secret weapon. Another gift from Mother Nature.

It began a few months back when I was complaining about my aches and pains to my marathon-running buddy, Ben, who is my same age. He casually mentioned how he uses CBD oil to help with his joint pain. He said that CBD has given him more focus and clarity throughout the day and that his lingering muscle and joint discomfort no longer bothered him. He even felt comfortable signing up for back-to-back marathons two weekends in a row this year.

That made even this self-proclaimed skeptic take notice.

But I still had some concerns. According to one study in the Journal of the American Medical Association, 70% of CBD products didn't contain the amount of CBD stated on their labels. And, as a consumer, that's terrifying!

If I was going to do this, I needed to trust the source through and through. My two-fold research process naturally led me to Zebra CBD.

First, I did a quick online poll—and by that, I mean I posed the CBD question on my Facebook page. Call me old fashioned but I wanted to know if there were people whom I trusted (more than anonymous testimonials) who've had success using CBD besides my buddy. That is how I found out that Zebra CBD has a label accuracy guarantee which assures customers like me what is stated on the label is in the product.

Secondly, I wanted cold hard facts. Diving deep into the world of CBD research and clinical studies, I came across Emily Gray M.D., a physician at the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) Medical School and Zebra CBD medical advisor who is researching the effects of CBD. Dr. Gray wrote "early results with CBD have been promising and we have a lot of research underway now. I've had several patients using CBD with good success. It's important that you know your source of CBD and how to use it properly."

After hearing it from the doctor's mouth, I returned to my online poll and was amazed by the number of close friends and family who were already on the CBD train. Apparently, I was the only one without a clue! And funny enough, a couple of friends who commented were using the same brand as my buddy—Zebra CBD. There was no consensus as to why they were using CBD, but the top reasons given were for muscle & joint discomfort, mood support, sleep support, stress and headaches, as well as supporting overall health & wellness.

Eventually, even the most skeptical of the bunch can be won over. With a trusted CBD source in mind, I decided to try it.

When I viewed Zebra CBD's selection online, I was impressed by its array of products, including CBD oils called tinctures, topicals, chewable tablets, mints and gummies. After reading on their website that all their products are made with organically-grown hemp, I ordered... and it arrived within 2 days!

The first product I tried was the rub. Now this stuff was strong. Immediately after rubbing it on my knee, the soothing effects kicked in. It had that familiar menthol cooling effect, which I personally find very relieving. And the best part is, after two weeks of using it, my knee pain no longer affected my daily mobility.

The Zebra Gummies, on the other hand, had a different but equally positive effect on my body. To take it, the instructions suggest holding in your mouth for about 30 seconds. This was simple enough, and the taste was, well, fruity. After about 15 minutes, a sense of calm came over my body. It's hard to describe exactly; it's definitely not a "high" feeling. It's more like an overall sense of relaxation—a chill factor. Needless to say, I've really enjoyed the gummies.

While it hasn't been a catch-all fix to every one of my health issues, it has eased the level and frequency of my aches. And it sure doesn't seem like a coincidence how much calmer and more focused I am.

All-in-all, CBD is one of those things that you have to try for yourself. Although I was skeptical at first, I can say that I'm now a Zebra CBD fan and that I highly recommend their products. My 40s are looking up!

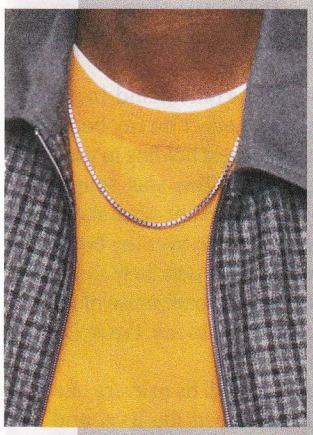
Also, I managed to speak with a company spokesperson willing to provide an exclusive offer to our readers. If you order this month, you'll receive $10 off your first order by using promo code "**ESQ10**" at checkout. Plus, the company offers a 100% No-Hassle, Money-Back Guarantee. You can try it yourself and order Zebra CBD at ZebraCBD.com.

BLOW UP BUSINESS CASUAL—THEN *REBUILD* IT

WHILE SOME MAY ENJOY THE EYEBROW-raising disruption of wearing a suit when you absolutely don't have to wear a suit, there's something equally satisfying about fine-tuning a look designed to be eminently at-home, no matter the situation. About putting together an outfit that you can wear to do the thing you're doing (work, golf, meeting the in-laws) and then to have a drink or three later. It's time to start thinking about how to stretch a fit in anticipation of spontaneity, because spontaneity is back, baby.

Of course, your inner cozy boy knows that our collective discovery that comfort really is king isn't going anywhere. And your subconscious stunter is just itching for a reason to flaunt some personal style again. That these impulses might seem to be at odds with each other isn't an issue; it's an opportunity. This is your chance to take the ease of your favorite sweats and channel it into loose-fitting trousers that trade cotton for wool and gathered ankles for elegant cuffs. It's your excuse to let that crewneck hang loose like it has for a year and a half but throw an office-ready jacket and a subtle silver chain on top of it. It's your shot at showing off again—this time from both ends of the style spectrum simultaneously. If you're not yet desperate to head to the tailor and your colleagues are the type of snobs who scoff at track pants, this is your sweet spot.

Ultimately, it also means sitting pleasantly in your desk chair, not squirming about in Hard Clothes that feel foreign. But not feeling like a slouch, either. Pants with pleats are Work Pants, even if they're as roomy as the Dorito-stained Home Pants you never laundered because they live below the Zoom window. Looking put together and being comfortable has always been a sort of style nirvana. There's never been a better moment to achieve it.



JACKET ($545) AND TROUSERS ($248) BY **BOSS;** SWEATER ($950) BY **GABRIELA HEARST;** T-SHIRT BY **VELVA SHEEN;** BOOTS ($799) BY **MALONE SOULIERS;** NECKLACE ($201) BY **TOM WOOD.**

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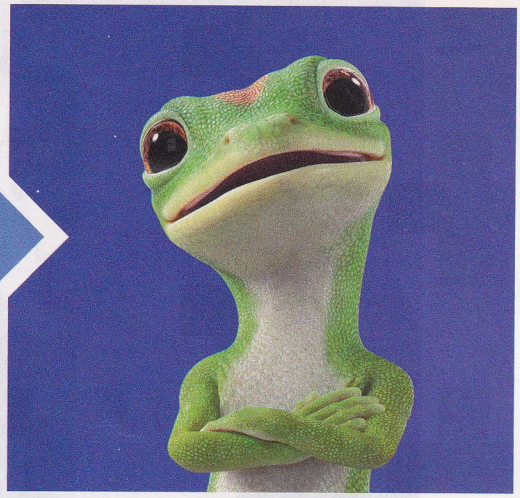

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THE WHITE SNEAKERS

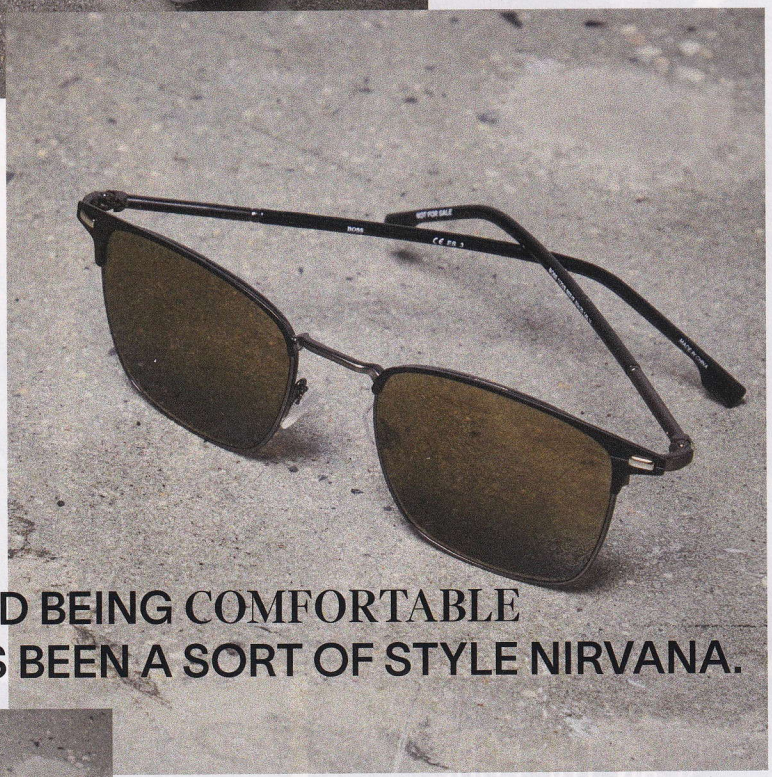
There are so few things you can be sure of in life, but damn-good white sneakers are one of them. There's not a look in this whole magazine that these won't work alongside. Go ahead, flip through. You'll see.

SNEAKERS ($198) BY **GOOD MAN BRAND.**

THE SUNGLASSES

Your corneas have become accustomed to whatever overhead lighting you have in your living room, but the sun is still out there, man. And we've got only so much left of her. Look her right in the face and tell her you love her. But put these on first. Bonus: They're great for walking into the office hungover.

SUNGLASSES BY **BOSS.**



LOOKING PUT TOGETHER AND BEING COMFORTABLE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SORT OF STYLE NIRVANA.

THE BAG

Are you going to come back on the scene carrying the backpack you've had since your thesis was in first drafts? Or are you going to come back with a carryall that's big enough to fit exactly what you need and no more? Thought so. Ditch the excess and let the boys with the big bags dig for their pens.

BAG ($1,150), **SAINT LAURENT BY ANTHONY VACCARELLO.**

SECURE

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Designed to fit a man's body, Depend® Guards and Shields are built to protect.

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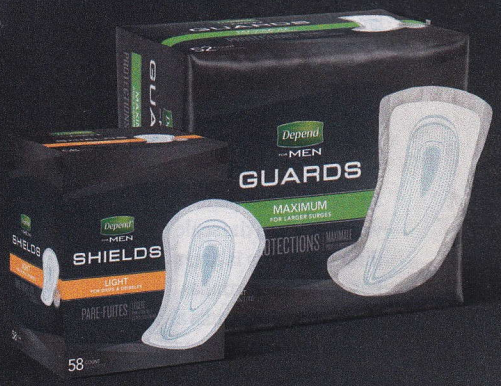

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LET THAT FREAK FLAG FLY

DRESSING TO THE NINES? SHOOTING FOR THE high/low sweet spot? Both good options. But here's the thing: Even as they push things forward, they both also presume a return to some sort of sartorial baseline. What if, instead of nodding to the past, you want to charge headlong into a future of your own design?

The best way to do it is to take all the slouchy, stretchy, somewhat-wild stuff you lived in at home over the past year-plus but never had the opportunity or audacity to wear IRL before and just fuckin' go for it. Throw on your kookiest cardigan over a pair of plum-colored track pants, then throw open the front door and step boldly out into the world. Wear a tie-dye sweatshirt. Wear tie-dye socks. Wear them together!

The trick here is to push it so far it passes the point of "Why is he doing that?" and enters the land of "Holy shit, how is he doing that?" You want to bring together things so unexpected, so unabashed, that by the time you're done building your beautiful pastiche, it doesn't look like a mistake—it looks like a revelation. That means it can't be entirely haphazard. You'll need to weigh color and texture and pattern and be willing to admit to yourself when the scale has slipped too far in any direction. This is art, not science; there are no hard-and-fast formulas for success. But when you get it right, the results are intoxicating.

And besides, you may never get this opportunity again. Maybe you're still working from home. Maybe you're back in the office (in which case you might want to save all this gonzo stuff for your off-duty moments and consult the preceding pages for some HR-appropriate inspiration). But if humanity's luck holds—hey, it could happen—we won't find ourselves in another moment of radical recalibration like this one in our lifetime. Don't you want to rise to the occasion? Then go ahead and grab your cardigan and let your freak flag fly.

CARDIGAN ($3,210) BY **ALANUI;** SWEATSHIRT ($230) AND TRACK PANTS ($145), **STADIUM BY STADIUM GOODS;** SNEAKERS ($80) BY **REEBOK;** SOCKS ($15) BY **THE COLOURS SHOP.**

WARNING: Smokeless tobacco is addictive.

SMOKELESS TOBACCO

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THE POUCH

A little bag with a lot of color? Damn right. Leave the briefcases to the traditionalists and opt for fun instead.

BAG ($1,980) BY **FENDI MEN'S.**

YOUR BEAUTIFUL PASTICHE SHOULDN'T LOOK LIKE A MISTAKE—IT SHOULD LOOK LIKE A REVELATION.

THE SNEAKERS

Some sneakers are designed to blend in quietly. Others are meant to declare their presence in no uncertain terms. You want the latter.

SNEAKERS ($150), **ADIDAS ORIGINALS BY WALES BONNER.**

THE BUCKET HAT

Talk all you want about a three-hour tour; real heads know a bucket hat that doesn't skimp on the pattern and texture is the secret weapon of in-the-know, out-of-bounds dressers who appreciate the power of a well-placed accessory. In other words: guys like you.

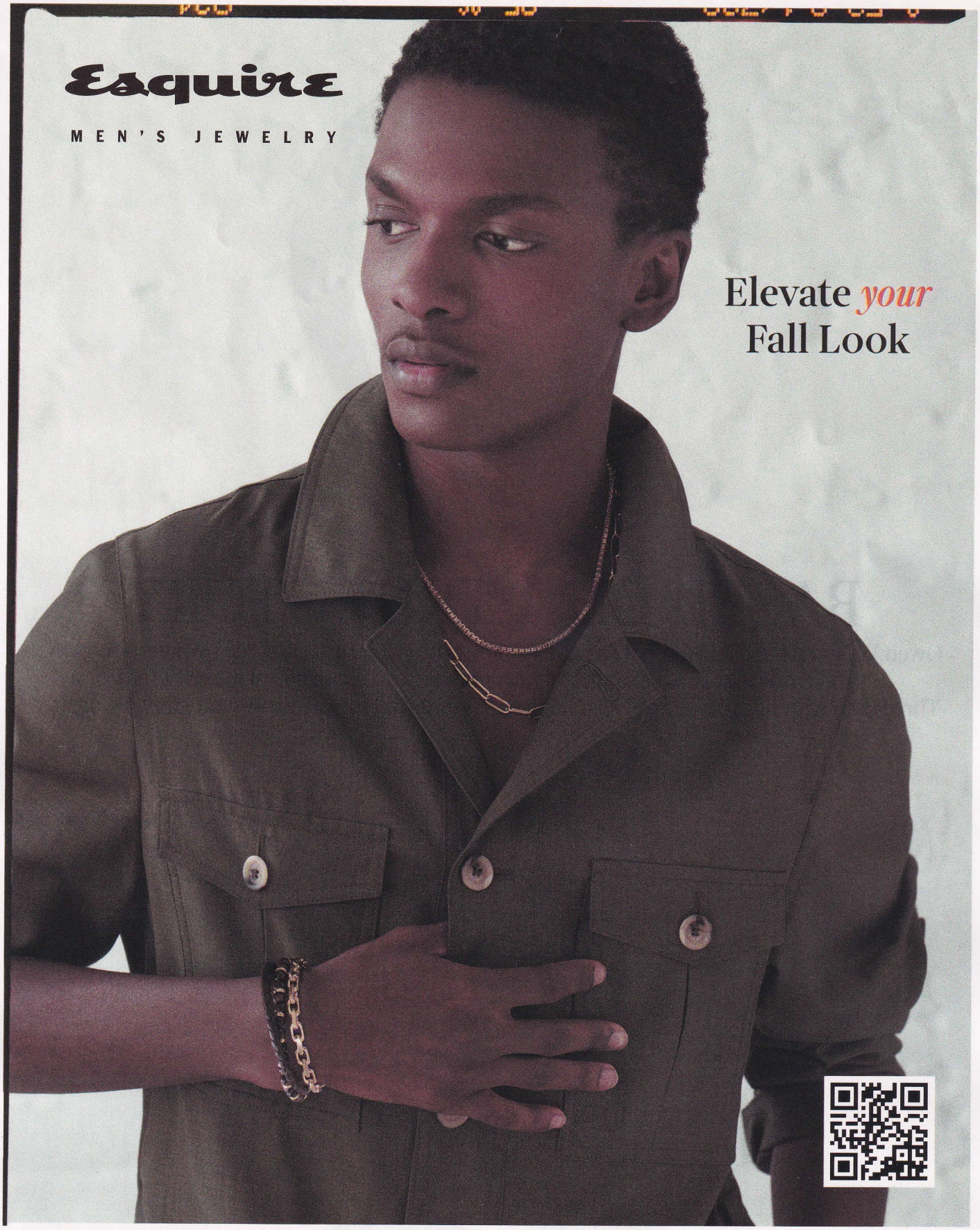
HAT ($285) BY **ISABEL MARANT.**

THE BRACELETS

Arm parties are here again! But instead of understated beads or cuffs, go for something that feels a little weirder and craftier. The future is funky, and you are, too.

BRACELETS (FROM TOP: $90, $75, $75) BY **ROXANNE ASSOULIN.**

FOR STORE INFORMATION SEE PAGE 124



LEFT TO RIGHT: Double-Wrap Tiger's Eye Bracelet in 14k Gold Over Sterling Silver, $400; Cable Link Chain Bracelet, $649; Cable Link 22" Chain Necklace in Gold-Tone Ion-Plated Stainless Steel, $225; 2-Pc. Set Box Link 22" Chain Necklace and Bracelet in 14k Gold-Plated Sterling Silver, $650

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BASED ON A TRUE STORY

Owen Wilson has a cold, but that's nothing a few avocado pancakes, some hydration therapy, a bike ride, hot tea, half a slice of Key-lime pie, and the magic of life can't fix. Three days with the star of *Loki*, *The French Dispatch*, and all those movies you know by heart.

By Ryan D'Agostino
Photographs by Mark Seliger
Styling by Bill Mullen

Jacket by **Hermès;** vintage shirt and tank, available at **the Society Archive;** trousers by **Nanamica;** hat by **Gladys Tamez Millinery;** vintage belt, available at **Stock Vintage, NYC.**

IS THAT HIM?

There's a guy hovering over the asphalt, way, way down the street, a head with a ball cap and sunglasses. When you can see his whole body, it turns out he's riding a bicycle, which was why it looked like he was hovering. He's half standing on the bike, one leg straight, lips pursed to the relative wind, like a kid cruising to the bike racks at school. The bike maintains speed even though he's not pedaling. He wears long pants, though the weather is warm.

This could be the start of the article, I'm thinking.

But what's this? There's another guy hovering behind him, on another bike. Two people. So maybe it's not him? Except now that he's closer, it's almost definitely him: craggily handsome face, blond hair shagging down from under the ball cap, really cool plaid shirt.

And if it is *him, and we're supposed to have breakfast, should I have been waiting in that long line? Or does he not have to wait in line, because he's famous? Maybe this is his regular breakfast spot–they know him, and he has a special table–so waiting in line would make me look like an amateur.*

Or maybe everybody knows that as soon as you arrive at Blueys, you better get right *in that line. He's going to wonder why I'm standing out here by the parking lot, waving.*

Who's this other guy?

IS THAT HIM?

He looks nervous. I guess he thought it was shorts weather. This is the writer? So pale. He's kind of shifting from foot to foot. I'm glad I brought the Allen wrench for the other bike, because he's kind of tall, and we might need to adjust the seat.

I also hope this sore throat goes away. It's a cold coming on, I think. I wonder if we should have pushed this interview to later in the day.

There's a line. There wasn't a line the other time. Maybe there's usually a line and me and Paul just got lucky that time?

That's okay. Maybe this is a good beginning to the story.

This writer looks nervous–if that's who that is. Now he's waving.

"THERE'S A LITTLE BIT OF A LINE," OWEN WILSON SAYS, HIS VOICE LOW, as if these might be the first words he has spoken today.

It's a warm Saturday morning in June, and we're at Blueys, a restaurant in an industrial part of Santa Monica. Owen has just pulled up on an electric bike with a guy on another bike who says hello, gets off his bike, and vanishes. The other bike is for me to use after breakfast.

"Do you want to go somewhere else?" I ask, and immediately regret it.

With calm in his voice, Owen says, "Well, hold on…I think…let's just…" and walks toward the door, scoping it out.

You order at a counter, then they bring you your food at one of the outside tables. Earnest California food–you can substitute soyrizo for chorizo in your breakfast burrito, and there's bulletproof coffee, that kind of thing. Locals recently awakened from a yearlong slumber are draped over the furniture like Dalí clocks, clutching latte mugs with two hands.

We walk inside, then back out into gray light filtering through a cornflower-blue sky. The employees smile at us, but no one speaks. "Here, maybe we can just go over there and sit down," Owen says. He walks toward an empty picnic table around a corner, shaded from the sun. People sit at all the other tables, but for some reason not this one, tucked back in the alley.

But then he changes course! He walks over to a shortened school bus parked on the outskirts of the restaurant seating. They're selling vintage clothing out of the bus. Owen looks at a bright-yellow windbreaker that says CAMARO Z/28. He peers into the back of the bus. A brown T-shirt hangs inside, commemorating the 1987 Iditarod.

"Do you know what the Iditarod is?" he asks me.

I do, I tell him.

He eases his jaw forward into an Owen Wilson smile.

"Let's sit down," he says, his hand on my shoulder.

ONE HOUR LATER

We haven't ordered. We don't have food yet. We don't have coffee yet. Just talking. Waitstaff whir around, trolleying quinoa bowls and acai.

The scene sends Owen's memory to another restaurant, which makes him smile. He and Wes Anderson were writing *The Royal Tenenbaums,* the 2001 movie for which they were nominated for a best-original-screenplay Academy Award, and as part of the backstory, they made up a restaurant called Sloppy Huck's, which Royal Tenenbaum (played by Gene Hackman) used to take his kids to when they were little.

"It was this place with peanut shells on the floor and an odd menu with stuff like rhubarb pie and corn-fritter casserole," he says. "There were those jukeboxes at each booth, right on the table, that you could flip through. And bullet holes in the window, because bad guys had tried to rob the cash register a couple of times, so Sloppy was always alert."

He's fifty-two. His skin is tanned and healthy–ruddy–and he has enviable blond hair that always looks like he went swimming in the ocean a half hour ago and it dried in the sun, annoyingly perfect. The blue eyes are as blue as they are in the movies, or bluer. His ball cap has a logo of a half doughnut, half taco, a totem from a recent movie shoot in Saratoga Springs, New York. (A man who owned a taco-and-doughnut shop gave it to him.) He does not place his phone on the table, the way most people do. He answers questions not as if he's being interviewed but rather as if he's standing in the corner at a party, chatting and telling delightful stories.

I'm starting to wonder, *How long do we have for this breakfast? Will he have to leave soon? Are we going to ride the bikes?*

"Sloppy Huck's didn't make it into the movie," he says, smiling down.

He asks questions. He is well-read. Very well-read. We parse the divergent narrative styles of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. He tells me about a book his brother Luke gave him recently: a biography of an obscure Swiss writer named Robert Walser. He mentions picking up a copy of *The Snow Leopard* not long ago, a book he says means a lot to him.

I, meanwhile, am asking him the normal interview questions, not yet getting where he is going. What exactly is the story going to be?

I bring up *Loki,* the smart, fun Marvel series he starred on for Disney+ as agent Mobius, with Tom Hiddleston. "We did a press junket for that yesterday," he says.

"What did they ask you?" is my probing inquiry.

"They asked me a lot about–'It sounds like you had to be convinced to do this.' I don't know where they're getting that. That isn't true. The director just called me and told me the idea, and I wanted to work on it. But somehow what seems to be in their press notes, maybe, is that I know zero about the MCU. I don't know a ton about it, but I know–"

He pauses.

"Actually, yeah, I probably don't know that much about it. I kind of know about Iron Man. I've seen *Aquaman*. He's swimming in jeans. No one can swim in jeans! That was my argument with the kids about *Aquaman*."

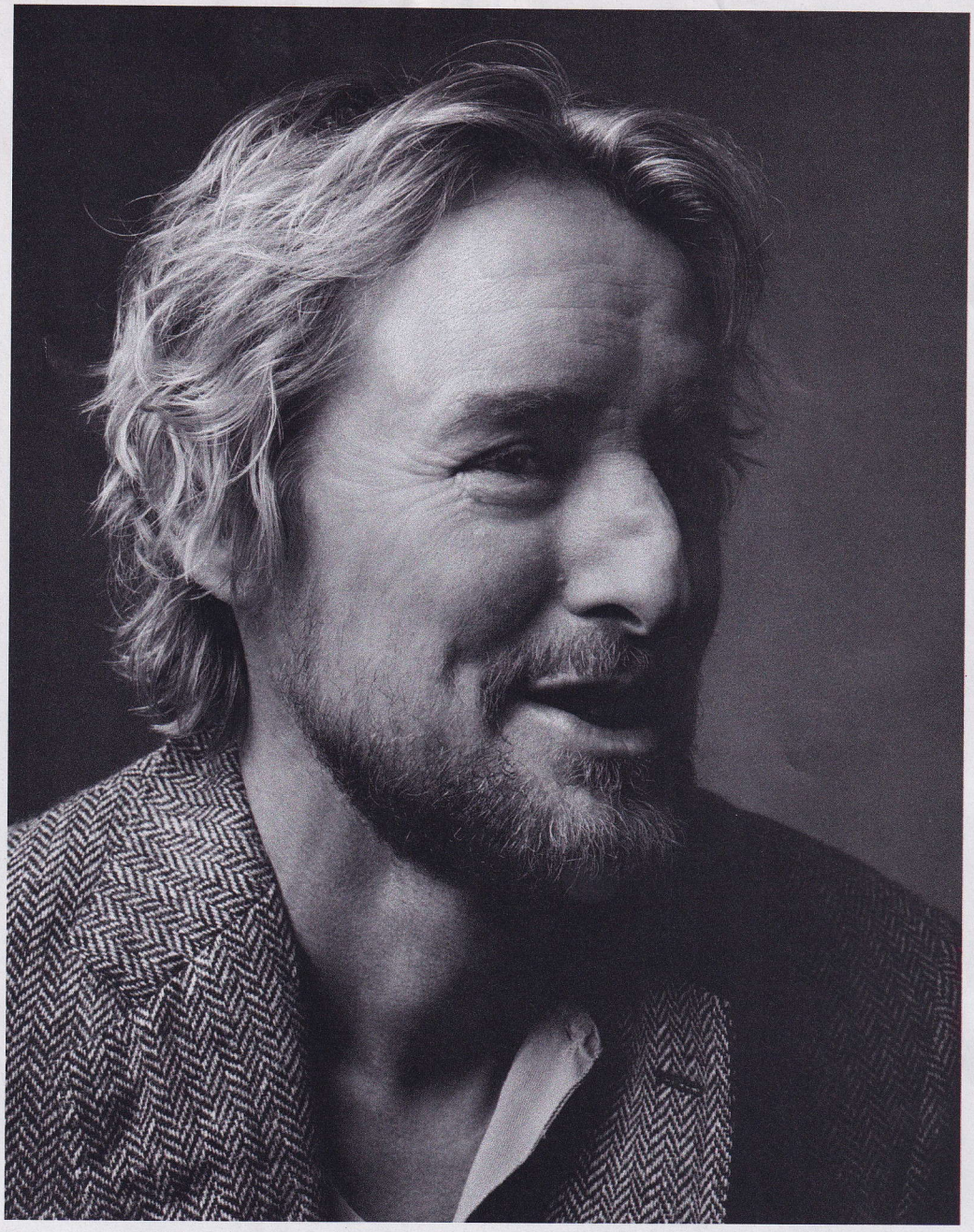
(Speaking of *Loki*: Owen is known to improv lines on set, and in one scene in the first episode, Loki is acting very self-important during Mobius's interrogation. Mobius simply says, "You're just a little pussycat." "All Owen," Hiddleston tells me.)

It's not that Owen is *un*interested in talking about this stuff, but pretty soon he's drifting away from it, telling me about when he was in Atlanta filming *Loki* and he made up a leaf-catching game for himself and his kids. "We play that you have to catch it with one hand and run," he says. "It's nice because it gets you looking up."

He bobs his head almost imperceptibly, squints and smiles almost imperceptibly, and almost whispers: "Yeah. The Leaf-Catch Game."

THE DIGITAL RECORDER SITS ON THE TABLE IN FRONT OF HIM, ITS RED signal light a tiny beacon.

"Do you have to think of, like, an angle for the story?"



Jacket by **Tod's;** vintage shirt and tank, available at **the Society Archive.**

I try to, I say. An angle, an idea.

He nods with purpose. Deeper than a normal nod.

"Did you have a particular sport, growing up?" he asks.

"Yeah, I ran track."

"What'd you run?"

"Hurdles."

"You think you could beat me in a race?"

I look at him, stammering, the question hanging. "What?"

The smiling blue eyes, fixed on me. *You heard me.*

"Do you think you could beat me in a race?"

I think this is what Jennifer Aniston, who has made two movies with Owen, means when she tells me, "He's disarming."

Leaf catching. Running races. Is this a thing? I ask Owen. Does he challenge people? Does he make up games?

"Yeah, well, my brothers would say I make up *rules*."

"It goes back to childhood and continues up to yesterday," says his brother Andrew, older by four years. Owen's crowning achievement in game invention is called Tip Horse, a basketball-based combination of 21 and horse, at which he is so commanding that while playing it he refers to himself as Professor Tippins. "There's a whole slew of rules, and even with every rule there's an addendum, and also every rule is negotiable," Andrew says.

Everyone seems to have a story: During the filming of *The Grand Budapest Hotel* in Germany, Owen invited Adrien Brody to go bowling one night. Owen claimed he had never bowled. Brody took the first two games, and there was a round of beers with each. Owen then announced that the winner of the next game would cover the drinks. "And he murdered me!" Brody says.

"There was a lake in the neighborhood that we went to as kids," Luke says. "One summer, Owen tried a thing where, in order to be in the group, everybody had to do a new trick every day at the lake. So you found yourself just going higher and higher, up into this tree, and it kept getting more and more dangerous, and I remember thinking, *I'm gonna die trying to hang out with these guys*."

Ben Stiller: "One night maybe twenty years ago, Owen and me and Anthony Kiedis were challenging each other to a footrace around the Holly-

Jacket and trousers by **Brunello Cucinelli;** vintage shirt, available at **the Society Archive;** shoes, stylist's own; socks by **Pantherella.**

wood Reservoir–*there's* a nineties story for you. I don't think the race ever even happened, but Owen was the one who brokered that it was going to happen." Stiller says Owen loves "connections in life." That's the root of his incessant invention of competitive games, I think: Games are fun, and when people have fun together, they stay connected.

They stay friends.

"HERE COMES YOUR MAN," BY PIXIES, COMES ON. "THEY ALSO PLAY great *music* at this place," he says, as if suddenly revealing an unseen truth.

I mention that, in my rental car, I've been listening to 80s on 8, the SiriusXM channel that plays eighties music exclusively.

"I sometimes can't listen to that, because it's too heartbreaking," Owen says. "I would listen to it driving home, and it was like, I can't *take* this song right now. I listen to, I think it's channel 73, 40s Junction or something. I love that."

"Me too. That one sounds like the soundtrack to a Woody Allen movie–hey, *there's* a great movie," I say.

"Yeah, *Midnight in Paris.* I remember talking to someone before doing it and saying, 'Wouldn't it be great if this was like a *Vicky Cristina Barcelona,* one of *those* Woody Allen movies? Like a *good* one?' And I remember sitting through the screening at Cannes next to Rachel McAdams and thinking, *Well, it's definitely not one of those!* What a *disaster*. But then it *has* been one of those! So it's strange, isn't it? That you can't process something like that while you're doing it. Because now I can see it and go, 'Oh, yeah, it's good!' "

Owen can seem like a man who's rolling through life, as if he stumbled along from a previous century and will eventually wander off down the road, into the future. Or, to put it a slightly different way, a goofball. But people who know him well say that while, yes, he is those things, he's also more formidable than that. "He's deceptively intelligent and sometimes even hides his intelligence and how well-read he is," Wes Anderson says. "He surprises you in the course of getting to know him. People might underestimate him sometimes."

But he is also undeniably just good to have around. "People are drawn to him. If kids were picking teams, he might be good at whatever the sport is, but I think he'd be picked even quicker than his talent at the sport would suggest, just because people want him on their team," Anderson says.

On *Marley & Me,* Aniston tells me, "Owen and I volleyed back and forth really well together. I remember laughing a lot, and I love nothing more than someone who can make me laugh. It's the key to my heart."

Andrew acted with Owen in *Bottle Rocket,* the first movie Owen wrote with Anderson, the first movie Anderson directed, and Owen's first time acting at all. Owen plays Dignan, a quirkily charming outsider with amateurish aspirations to a life of crime. "There's this scene where my character is really mean to his," Andrew says. "I make fun of this jumpsuit he's wearing and then drive off. And Luke, who plays his friend, tries to reassure Dignan and says, 'Did you see what he was wearing?' and Dignan says, 'Yeah, it was pretty cool.' I think you're seeing a little bit of Owen there."

The French Dispatch, the seventh Anderson film in which Owen has appeared, is the kind of film he calls "handmade," a compliment he applies to the work of filmmakers like Allen, Wes Anderson, and Paul Thomas Anderson, with whom Owen worked on *Inherent Vice. French Dispatch* is a triumph of visual storytelling–watching it is like reading the best issue ever published of a great magazine, which is what the movie is about. The way Owen talks about it, with a lilting voice, you can hear happiness, not only to be in this film but to be at this place–at this place in his career, at this place for breakfast, in this town where he's lived for twenty-five years and it's a beautiful day and his kid has a soccer game later. All of it.

"I don't know. I've been in sort of a lucky place of feeling pretty appreciative of things," he says, seeming almost surprised. "I know everything's kind of up and down, but when you get on one of these waves, you've gotta ride it as long as you can. I've just felt–yeah. Feeling pretty grateful. Well, *grateful*'s one of those words that get used all the time. *Appreciative*. Of, you know, stuff."

A butterfly carries his words off into the flowers of a nearby jacaranda tree, and he looks up and says, "How's our line doing?"

ANOTHER HOUR LATER

We're sharing pancakes he ordered for me after seeing other people order them. They're warm and made with squash, and there's some kind of cool avocado mash between each layer of the stack, and oaten granola with berries and maple syrup on top. A meal in a dream.

"Isn't that *interesting*? A vegetable," Owen says. "Is that guacamole in there?"

All of the waitstaff at the restaurant wear pastel-colored T-shirts that read on the back, WISH YOU WERE HERE. "Is that really what the T-shirts say here?" Owen asks. He's laughing, in disbelief, looking around. "Did we get hit by a garbage truck? Is this heaven? Because one minute I've got a sore throat. And you're–" He's chewing.

"I don't know *where* I am."

"You don't know *where* you are! You're jet-lagged. Standing out in the parking lot waving."

"I was looking for you, but there were all these menacing signs about where you could and couldn't park, and I got nervous."

"*Don't quit before the miracle*. You were so ready to hit the eject button! Like right when I first saw you, you go, 'Should we go?' And I said, '*Nuh nuh nuh,* let's see.' And I knew I had someone who was panicking on my hands. 'We're losing this cadet!' I could feel it. I knew I couldn't put you in the line–there was *no* way I could do that to you. Let's just get him relaxed for a little bit. And then very gently I said, 'Has the line gone down?' And you were up [*claps*] like a *shot*!"

We eat in silence for a few minutes. I revert to my interview questions: Does he cook?

"I don't, *ahh,* cook," he says slowly, stifling a grin. "I make pretty good sandwiches."

"What kind of sandwiches?"

"Well, it's really like a peanut butter and jelly," says Owen, smiling now.

"Crunchy or smooth? This is what people want to know."

"I think I *prefer* the crunchy. Although I actually use *almond* butter, but I *call* it a peanut butter and jelly."

Here Owen pauses, dabs his mouth with the napkin, nods his head as if he's come to a conclusion.

"It would be nice to not feel any pressure with this story–the way I sometimes feel with movies–to do *set* pieces. Just to have a story be . . . I wouldn't say boring, because *I don't find it* boring. A movie that's just this. Where we don't have whatever burden you have with an article, where we gotta *do* something. We were kind of kidding about how this is the stuff people want to know: 'No, it's not crunchy peanut butter. I use smooth, but actually I use *almond* butter in place of peanut butter.' See, I *do* find that interesting!"

I sip the dregs of the watermelon smoothie he recommended. A few flecks of chile dust survived the smoothie's journey to the bottom of the glass. The last sip is the best. "Stuck in the Middle with You" is playing.

"This place," I say, shaking my head.

Owen, as if clutching my shoulders with his hands, grins and says, "Now do you get it?"

THE BIOGRAPHY IS NOT THE STORY.

Owen Wilson grew up in Dallas, the middle child between Andrew and Luke, three years younger. Both parents were originally from Massachusetts. Owen's father, Bob, was a TV executive and an advertising man who graduated from Dartmouth and loyally raised money for the college even after all three of his sons were rejected by the admissions department. Bob was a great dad, the kind of guy everybody liked to be around. The Wilson boys grew up comfortable and got along well, playing football and doing the required homework. Their mother, Laura, a photographer, cooked the

When *I'm in the restroom,* I leave my recorder *on the table.* BACK *"Still waiting for you to* COME BACK, *which reminds me*

family dinner almost every night, and there were no sugar cereals or soft drinks in the house. Owen was expelled from a private high school due to various incidents of prankery, wisecracking, and charming but irritating insubordination. He ended up attending a military school in New Mexico that Andrew had heard about from a college friend. He did one year at USC before transferring to UT Austin, from which he did not quite graduate but where he met Wes Anderson in a playwriting class. They wound up becoming roommates and cowriting a short film called *Bottle Rocket,* which in 1996 they made into a feature, somehow getting James Caan to play a supporting role. Other cast members included Dipak Pallana, who owned an Indian café where Owen played chess; Dipak's father, Kumar, who played a safecracker named Kumar; and Stephen Dignan, a friend from home, whose last name was used for Owen's character. Owen bought a house after *Bottle Rocket* that he intended to flip but still lives in today. He later got a place in Maui, too. Like millions of other people, he has battled depression and in 2007 had the wrenching experience of the world hearing reports that he had attempted to take his own life. He recovered from that awful episode with friends and family supporting him daily, wrapping their love around him, sleeping by his side. He's always declined to talk publicly about that, but he's made a lot of good, and some great, movies since, like *Marley & Me, Fantastic Mr. Fox, Hall Pass, Midnight in Paris, The Big Year* (a bird-watching movie with Steve Martin), *She's Funny That Way* (directed by legend Peter Bogdanovich and Owen's second film with Aniston), *Inherent Vice,* and *Lost in London* (written and directed by Woody Harrelson, and if there's one movie on this list you've never heard of but manage to see, let it be this). Plus *Loki* (not a movie but fantastic) this year (season 2 is in the works), along with the magnificent *French Dispatch* (opening October 22) and the delightful *Marry Me* (opening February 2022, in which his love interest is Jennifer Lopez). He has two young sons, ten and seven, by two different former partners–everyone lives nearby and gets along, and Owen has the boys on a single-dad schedule. The other evening, he was trimming the younger one's fingernails, and the boy was getting upset and saying, "Don't go below the line!" and Owen was saying, "Just relax!" and the whole scene was fraught with tension. Afterward, Owen said to his son, "What do you say?" and the boy said, dutifully, "*Thaaank youu,*" and then muttered to his brother, "for nothing." Owen heard it. "It's funny how we get cast in these roles, because it seems like just yesterday *I* was the one muttering 'for nothing,' and now I'm the person in this role. Once you're an adult, you think childhood was so innocent and beautiful, but you forget. That's why I liked in *Last Tango* when she's talking about how beautiful being a kid is, and Brando says, 'Is it beautiful to be made into a tattletale? Or be forced to admire authority?' That's a big part of being a kid: being *broken*.... It's like *Cool Hand Luke*–I'm breaking him. And then he says, 'For nothing.' [*Smiles.*] That was me. That's how you wind up at military school, all those 'for nothing's."

WE RIDE THE E-BIKES TO A SPORTSPLEX OF A HALF DOZEN TURF BALL fields, kids and parents everywhere. As we go to the fence, Owen hollers, "Hey, buddy," and his older boy, warming up, shouts a quick "Hey, Dad!"

We dally around, and Owen outlines the rules of a bike game he and Woody Harrelson made up on Maui: "You see who has to put their foot on the ground first. You can use your hand on a pole, or a car, but the first person to put their foot down loses. You'd be surprised: You can do this for hours, and it's pretty fun."

I try to resume a normal interview. What music did he first love as a kid?

"The first concert I ever went to was Rolling Stones, 1981, *Tattoo You*. At the Cotton Bowl."

"That's a good first concert. Mine was Chicago."

"Chicago! Wow," he says, his first Owen Wilson *wow* of the day, a full two-plus syllables. "You know what Chicago song I love, though? The one in the park."

"Saturday, in the park..."

"That's kind of our day today! People laughing and a man selling ice cream. Just the way we've salvaged this."

"Was it going south?"

"It *was*. In fact, if we're being honest, I was reversing it. *I* was panicking when I saw that line at Blueys. So it becomes a *Rashomon* story. First it was you freaking out, but now the truth is, I was panicking. When I had come to that same restaurant a few days ago, it was empty. But then it seemed like we're in a Hunter S. Thompson sort of thing where there's ghouls everyplace and this strange Charles Manson bus pulls up."

TWO DAYS LATER

"Hey! Yo!" I shout.

He stares across the street at me and waves. I'm on the phone with my wife, and I apologize to her for yelling into the phone. I tell her I have to go now because Owen just pulled up on his bike across the street. I'll call her later.

"Hey! Yo!" he shouts.

What the...? Who's screaming? Oh, wow, Ryan's yelling at someone on the phone. I wonder who it is. Man, he's still antsy, I guess.

Maybe the hydration will help.

THE NURSE SLIDES A NEEDLE INTO OWEN'S ARM FIRST, THEN PUTS ONE into mine.

Owen's still trying to kick his cold, so we're at the Hydration Room, part of a small chain of pristine storefronts where medical professionals hook you up to an IV and fill you with rejuvenating fluids and various cocktails of vitamins and nutrients. You feel fantastic afterward.

We lie on cushy lounge chairs for about a half hour while the fluids fill our veins. We're both speaking in low, librarian tones. I ask questions like "Where did you film *Behind Enemy Lines*?" That gets Owen talking about the in-water survival training he did for the movie, which gets him talking about *An Officer and a Gentleman* ("great water stuff"), which gets him talking about fight scenes.

"That's gotta be one of the best fight scenes ever in a movie," he says of Richard Gere's brawl with Louis Gossett Jr. in 1982. "*Two* great fight scenes, because there's also a fight scene when he leaves the bar and the local guys start messing with him, which doesn't go very well."

"Top five fight scenes in movies?"

Immediately Owen says, "Well, I would definitely say *Officer and a Gentleman*. That counts as one. And I guess *Billy Jack* is a great fight scene. Did you ever see the Billy Jack movies? God, I used to love those as a kid–"

The nurse comes with a syringe and gives us each a shot of something. Owen laughs like a dude who just scored some great drugs.

"Whoa-ho, this is the good stuff. See you on the other side! Here we go!"

I ask the nurse what it is. "Vitamin B-12," she says.

"That could be another element," he says. "We make top-five lists, but we're kinda lazy. We get to two or three, then we move on."

We sit in silence for a few minutes, B-12 coursing through us, a chill-out song playing through the Hydration Room speakers. The IV bags are empty

HOME, *when I listen to our conversation, I hear him say into the recorder, of what I consider to be* THE REAL KEY *to life. I'll tell you later."*

of their fluids, and the nurse appears again and disconnects us with great agility: needles out, gauze pressed firmly to the skin, bags removed from their hooks, lines coiled neatly.

"I felt like they just turned on the lights in the bar," Owen says. " 'Whoa, is it 2:00 already?' " He shuffles back toward the restroom, and when he reemerges, the nurse presents him with a small book and says, with pride in her voice, "You forgot this the last time you were here."

He holds the book, runs his hand over the jacket, as if over a smooth stone. It's called *Ten Poems to Change Your Life*. Finally, he speaks:

"I did?"

The nurse nods, pleased.

"But I haven't been here in maybe two years," he says.

"We kept it for you."

He looks across the room at me, smiles that mischievous, teeth-together smile, and shakes his head at the magic of it all.

"You see?"

I WONDER WHETHER I DO. I THINK I DO. SEVERAL TIMES, OWEN HAS used the term "magical realism," a literary genre in which the writer writes something unreal, or surreal, as if it were absolutely real. Owen seems to be always in search of making reality appear magical. Or making the magic of life more real. Or something.

Referring to the zany plot of their new movie *Marry Me*–pop megastar pulls a stranger out of the crowd and marries him–Jennifer Lopez says of Owen's performance, "He plays both with and against the absurdity of it all," which is actually a pretty good way to describe Owen.

In fact, it describes exactly why he can be so hard to describe, even after magical breakfasts, bike rides, and intravenous hydration sessions. Stiller–who hired him for 1996's *The Cable Guy,* has made more movies with Owen (fourteen) than anyone else, and had dinner with him the week after we met–tells me, "He lives this life that's kind of mysterious in a way. I find it mysterious. I don't think you could ever fully know him."

Luke remembers when Owen went away to military school, an experience that gets at what J. Lo is talking about: "After he'd been expelled from our high school and he went to New Mexico Military Institute, my dad and I went to visit him. It's just barren desert and this fortress out there, and to me it seemed like *The Lords of Discipline.* But then seeing Owen out there–buzz cut, uniform, his room and his locker, and how they had to walk in straight lines–he *embraced* all that. The last thing you'd think he would have taken to. But I guess there was just so much material there. He got a kick out of it."

Hampton Fancher, who wrote and directed *The Minus Man*–in which Fancher cast Owen as a serial killer after seeing *Bottle Rocket*–says, "He's a comedian, in the same way Jimmy Stewart was a comedian. Only he's funnier than Jimmy Stewart. He's existentially funny. He can tell a story, and it's oftentimes about the secret of things being the opposite–the joke of death."

Then he talks about the challenge of trying to capture the real Owen on film, reminding me a bit of Stiller's comment about the impossibility of really knowing him. "His face has this Germanic quality," Fancher says, "like Oskar Werner or Dennis Hopper, this kind of purity. Piero della Francesca, the Renaissance painter, paints that look. There's beauty there. I tried to capture it–that was my main failure in *Minus Man.* I wanted to capture that creamy, angelic thing in Owen's face, almost the way a kitten is. And I couldn't get it. I tried. He's formidable. He's got a tricky mind."

HOMELESS ENCAMPMENTS LINE SOME OF THE GRIDDED STREETS IN Venice, California. On one block, from inside a blue camping tent, an old woman shouts to a man in the next tent, "Shut up. You're not my friend!"

Owen walks a few paces and whispers, "God, no one wants to hear someone say that. Takes you right back to middle school. 'You're not my friend anymore.' "

He asks about my life, which has been difficult lately. The world knows something of his darkness, because he's famous, and I tell him something of mine–the chronically sick boy at home, which Owen knew about from an article I had written previously; the sudden, unexpected death of my brother five months earlier; the impossible task of raising children who have suffered trauma.

"As a kid, there's a lot of things that you think about," he says. "Death–that kind of landed with me when I was about eleven. And I don't remember ever talking with my parents about it. Although I *do* remember one time saying to my dad–and I remember exactly where in the house–saying, 'I worry about dying,' and seeing my dad turn away and catch himself. And I was surprised to see that reaction. But who knows, maybe that was part of why I said it."

The sidewalk buckles with broken, weedy stones as we trample on. I ask Owen about coming out of a dark place–how one does that, exactly. He doesn't talk much about his own close encounter with death, but he does tell me that Andrew stayed in his house with him after that, rising with him each morning and writing up little schedules for each day so that life seemed at first manageable and then, at some point, a long time later, actually good.

I'd think back to that a few weeks later when, in an email about something else, Owen offered a view of life through movies: "Sometimes it seems like life is being played by Gene Hackman in *Hoosiers*. Tough but fair. He's going to demand a lot, but if you play as a team and do your job, things work out. That's a good feeling. Things make sense. But of course sometimes life seems to be played by Tom Hardy in *The Revenant,* some nightmarish guy trying to kill you, where even if you get the upper hand, he's still going to be there at the end whispering, 'This ain't gonna bring your boy back' or your dad back or any good times from your past back. Or whatever. And when life's being played by that guy, you just gotta hang on and wait for it to pass."

The restaurant we're heading to appears, an open gate in a long wall, with string lights inside, a warm welcome. Owen's lips curl into a smile.

"I like this place," he says.

WE SIT IN THE IMMORTAL LIGHT OF THE SANTA MONICA DUSK, PLATES of food scattered, picked at, around the table–the remnants of a summer squash, a slice of Key-lime pie with spoon-shaped carvings up and down it, a quarter of a bottle of wine.

Owen looks at me, hard and cold, and asks:

"Did you order that Key-lime pie?"

I did, I tell him. His face lights up.

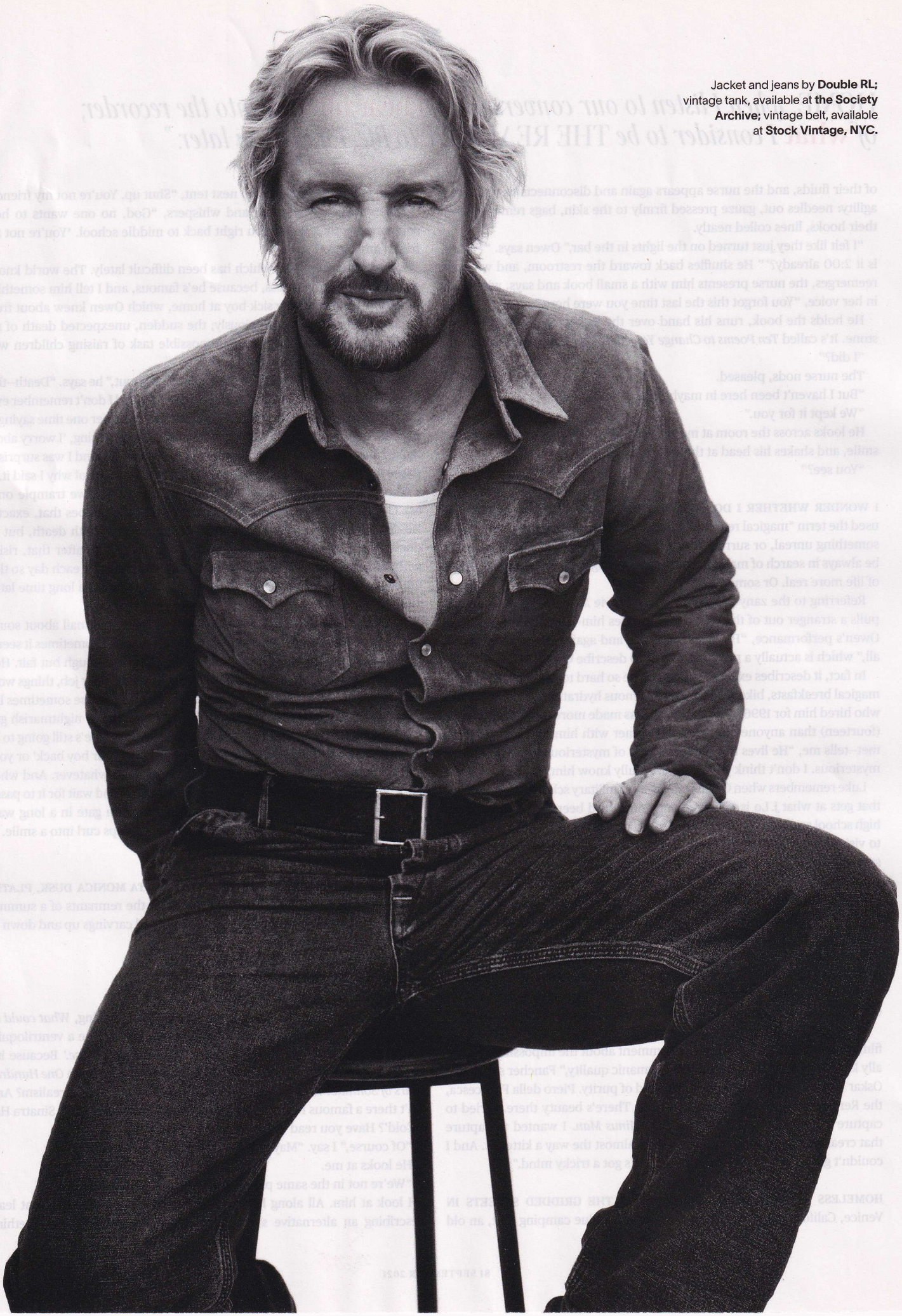
"I thought I imagined that. I thought I was just thinking, *What could be more incredible right now?* And I thought I was sort of like a ventriloquist who'd thrown that into Ryan's mouth. *'Key-lime pie, please.'* Because it's just been–even now with this twilight, is this not like we're in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*? Aren't those guys the masters of that magic realism? And isn't there a famous Esquire story, the New Journalism? 'Frank Sinatra Has a Cold'? Have you read that?"

"Of course," I say. "Maybe it's 'Owen Wilson Has a Cold'!"

He looks at me.

"We're not in the same place we were when we sat down."

I look at him. All along he's been trying to write my story, or at least describing an alternative story. Mine is a magazine profile. Something



Jacket and jeans by **Double RL;** vintage tank, available at **the Society Archive;** vintage belt, available at **Stock Vintage, NYC.**

good and a little revealing, I hope, but a magazine profile. Owen is after something else, something more fascinating, or fun. Something different, and yet something that's a thousand years old. He loves nothing more than a good story, I think. Loves to hear them, which is why he asks so many questions. Loves to tell them, which he does better than anyone. Loves to act in them, whether it's a story about a fucked-up family named the Tenenbaums, or about Starsky and his friend Hutch, or about an American magazine in France that employs a blond travel writer with a beret affectation.

The best stories in his life right now, he says, are the ones he tells to two little boys in their pj's, the way his dad used to make up stories for him and Andrew and Luke that often featured a recurring character named Crazy Maggie and her terrifying, mirthless laugh. "Sometimes telling the stories at night, you do take a little pride that *these guys are into this story*! One of them even said, 'Dad, you should do something with this. This is a really good story!' It was about this little pack of boys in a postapocalyptic world, and there's a pack of dogs–I play to my audience. There was a moment in the story where the girl that the one boy likes, he sees her with another boy, and he thinks they're holding hands"–he's speaking slowly now, and in his distinct accent the word *hands* is *hee*-yands–"but they're just playing that game, you know that game? You hold your palms out faceup, and the other person puts their palms on yours, and you have to slap the top hand really fast. And the kid sees that from afar and thinks they're holding hands, but it's actually the game. So sometimes, little things like that, you think, *That's a pretty good little element for a story*. A good little detail."

The sun continues its retreat. Owen is sipping his tea, legs outstretched, his feet shod in leather loafer-type shoes and crossed at the ankles.

"Maybe I should write this as a screenplay," I say, joking. "The whole story."

Owen arches his eyebrows and says, "Probably be better. Because then we could actually get into some of the stuff we're talking about."

EXT. — RESTAURANT COURTYARD — DUSK

OWEN and RYAN are seated at a round table at the edge of a sprawling stone patio with just a few tables. The check sits in its billfold, unpaid. A digital recording device sits on the table.

RYAN

Although sometimes that stuff can feel a little masturbatory.

OWEN

True–movies about the movies, or a writer writing about writing. But I always liked that part in *Hearts of Darkness* where he says, "Everyone says, 'Oh, this is just Francis; he'll figure it out.' Well, I'm not! I'm not gonna figure this out! I'm flunking this!" And what he says is, the worst thing you want to be accused of as an artist or a creative person is being pretentious. Or what you said, masturbatory. Same thing. But I just think that sometimes to do something–to *say* something–you have to risk people saying, "Oh, that's kinda bullshit, what that guy did." Sometimes you have to just walk through that fear and just try to tell it.

[*beat*]

Because, yeah–maybe that would be better.

RYAN

Better as in closer to who you are?

OWEN

Better story. I mean, it wouldn't be a crisis for Esquire. Would you get in trouble if you said, "Look, we're not gonna do this article. We're gonna do this other thing"? Could they get someone else for the cover?

RYAN's face shows that he realizes OWEN is suggesting that they abandon the article altogether and write an actual screenplay instead.

RYAN

I mean, I wonder if maybe we could do both?

OWEN

Isn't that what Esquire used to be? Who's the famous editor who did the Ali with the arrows? [*He leans in close and lowers his voice*.] Because maybe that's part of it, too: *There's nothing on the tape*. Because it was in here. [*Points to his heart*.]

RYAN

Did you sense me panicking again today?

OWEN

Well, you were shouting on the phone across the street when I saw you at the hydration place. That made me nervous. You were arguing with someone on the phone. I didn't want to ask what was going on, so I thought, *Let's just get an IV in him*.

RYAN

[*confused, trying to remember, then realizing*]

I was shouting at *you*!

OWEN

[*smiling, confused*]

You were?

RYAN

Yes! I was having a nice conversation with my wife but then shouted hello to you!

OWEN

I thought you were shouting at someone on the phone! See, that's life. A "Gift of the Magi" situation. I think you're yelling at some poor underling who had screwed up the reservation, but you were actually just gleefully shouting across the street to me.

RYAN

Want to go jump in the ocean in our underwear? See, I'm trying too hard again. A set piece.

OWEN

No, it's a good idea. Who knows, after I've been fortified by the tea, that might be our ending. Kind of a *Coming Home*-type ending, where we go for a swim, and one of us just keeps going. That's where the dramatic tension is. It isn't an existential, sad thing, but one guy's just decided: I'm going for the horizon.

DISSOLVE TO:
INT. — LAX TERMINAL — DAY

RYAN sits at an airport bar, sipping hibiscus water and eating a cheeseburger, trying to think of something funny to text OWEN as a way of checking in. He types into his phone, and it appears ONSCREEN as a text bubble:

> The last thing I remember is that IV going into my arm…

A few minutes later, OWEN writes back:

> Really? Are you okay? You remember us bodysurfing at least? We brought ol' man Pacific to his knees last night. I still remember seeing your tearstained face staring out of an avalanche of white water just laughing. You had a big streak of aloha painted right down the middle of your back. By the time we got to Sloppy Huck's for last call, it was gone.

RYAN, TEXTING:
I thought I dreamed that. Or maybe we had the same dream?

OWEN, TEXTING:
Maybe it's like the Aztecs say: "We come only to sleep / Only to dream / It is not true, it is not true / That we come to live on this earth"

[*beat*]

And stay hydrated!!!

DISSOLVE TO:
INT. — PHOTO STUDIO — NIGHT

Two weeks later. OWEN, in the New York studio of a renowned photographer, is changing out of

(continued on page 124)

When I was ten, my parents opened one of the first **Thai restaurants** in New Jersey. I started working in the kitchen before my voice broke. To us, the place was so much more than just a business. But as I grew into adulthood, what would **my parents' American dream** mean for me?

THIS boy's (working) LIFE

by KEVIN SINTUMUANG

photograph by BEN ALSOP

I REMEMBER THE NIGHT MY DAD SLEPT IN OUR FAMILY'S restaurant. Broken glass was scattered across the floor of the storefront that I had swept hours earlier. The cash register was overturned. Nothing was in it but pennies. Some food was taken. It could have been worse.

That night, he came back with a foldable reclining beach chair—one of those things meant for sunbathing—and lay there, half awake, with a gun inside a fanny pack. The next day, he boarded up the door with plywood. But he continued to sleep there, occasionally sitting in the restaurant's Ford Econoline van when he was restless, tuning in to the smooth-jazz station on the radio, CD 101.9.

My sister and I didn't understand. Was he waiting for the thieves to return? Did he just want some alone time with Kenny G? *Where did he get a gun?*

We never got a real explanation because, you know, dads.

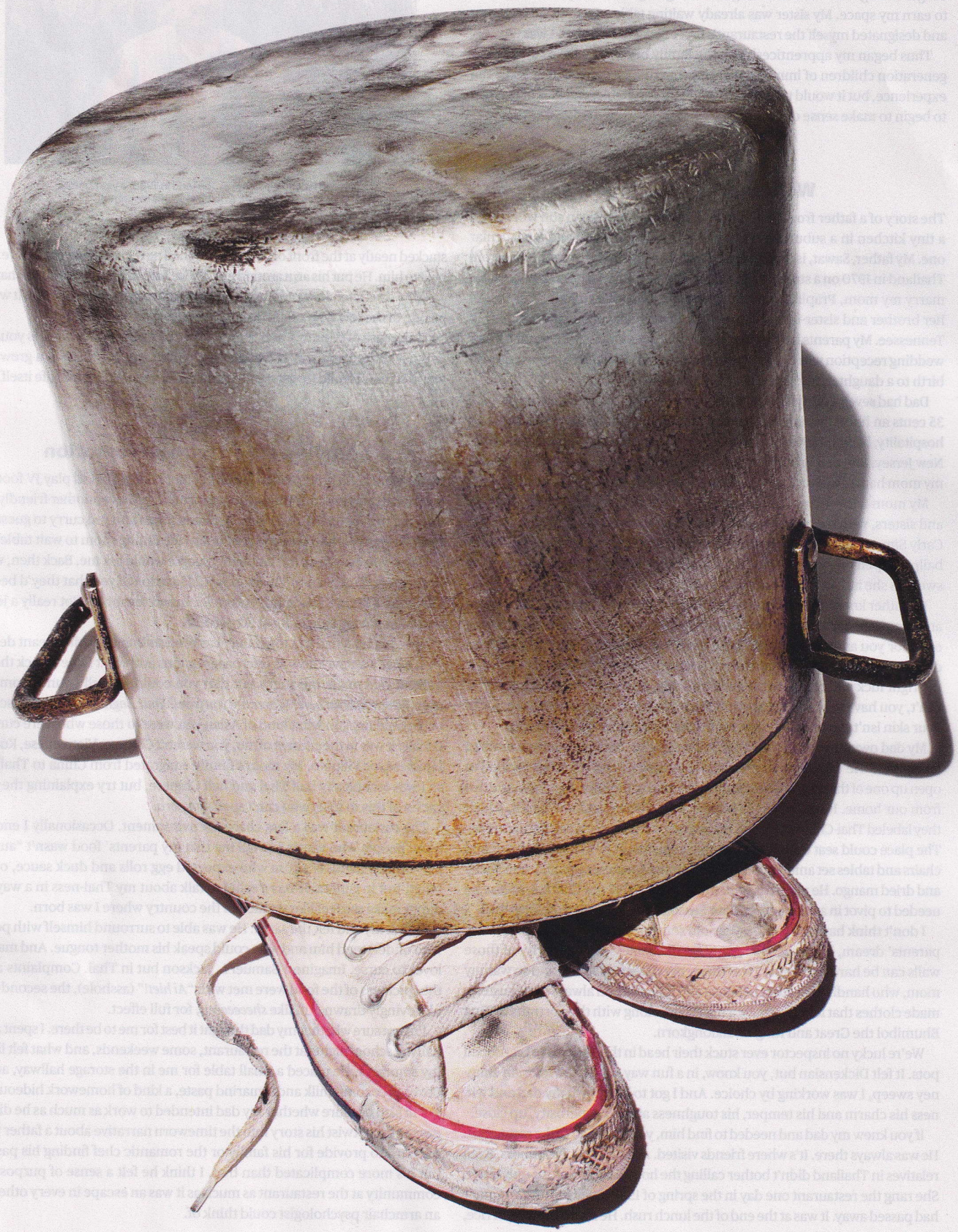
What was clear to me, even at the time: He was going to protect this place like it was his own home. In many ways it was, and not just for him but for all of us—especially for me.

CHAPTER ONE

In Which I Volunteer for Galley Service

From the time I was old enough to beat Super Mario Bros. 2, I shadowed my dad and hung around the restaurant every chance I got. It was like theater to be on the sidelines of a working kitchen. Long before the Food Network romanticized cooks and kitchens, I knew there was something special here. Listening to the hiss of noodles as they hit the surface of a fiery wok, followed by the gentle *clank clank clank* of a metal spoon incorporating the ingredients of a pad thai; breathing in the smell of curries simmering on the stove; watching cleavers chop through an order of gai yang, grilled chicken marinated in lemongrass, fish sauce, coriander, and ginger. This was my favorite dish as a kid, and I loved to sneak tastes of it.

My parents hadn't anticipated that Thai food would be this popular in the suburbs of 1989 New Jersey. On one particularly busy night, when there was a crowd outside waiting for tables



and we were running out of clean plates, I knew that hanging out in the walk-in fridge reading *X-Men* with a flashlight wasn't going to cut it anymore. I needed to earn my space. My sister was already waiting tables. So I put on an apron and designated myself the restaurant's first official dishwasher. I was ten.

Thus began my apprenticeship in the family business. Like so many first-generation children of immigrant entrepreneurs, I would be shaped by the experience, but it would take three decades, a pandemic, and kids of my own to begin to make sense of it all.

CHAPTER TWO

Welcome to America!

The story of a father from Thailand and his young American son working in a tiny kitchen in a suburban strip mall is both a universal and a particular one. My father, Sawat, is a self-taught cook. He came to the United States from Thailand in 1970 on a student visa to study computer science. He would later marry my mom, Prapin, who came here not long after to help take care of her brother and sister-in-law's three kids during their medical residency in Tennessee. My parents had known each other since elementary school. Their wedding reception was in a Chinese restaurant in Nashville. They would give birth to a daughter, my sister, Pear, a year later.

Dad had several odd jobs, including one in a vinyl factory where he got paid 35 cents an hour. Eventually, as many immigrants do, he found his way into hospitality, becoming the banquet manager at the Holiday Inn in Piscataway, New Jersey. But after an argument with his boss, he quit, even though he and my mom had a child on the way. (Me.) My dad was, and still is, an optimist.

My mom felt very much alone here, away from her family of six brothers and sisters, with nothing but a newborn daughter and her Joni Mitchell and Carly Simon records, which were so dear to her that she wrote her name in ballpoint pen on every single one, should they ever be stolen. My mom, as sweet as she is, can sometimes be a pessimist.

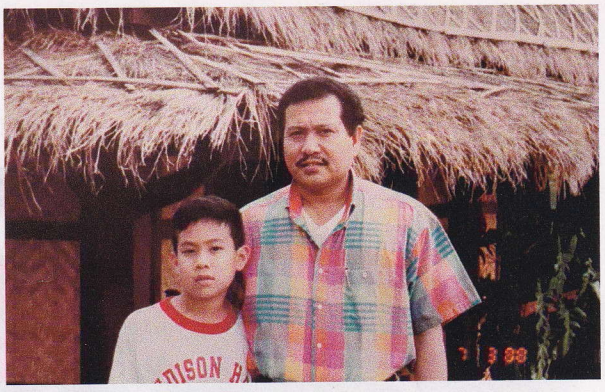
My father knew he would never get ahead working for someone else. It was an entrepreneurial instinct that sometimes kicks in when doors don't swing open for you as an immigrant. Call it the great conundrum of the American dream: There are opportunities for a relatively comfortable life if you've got the right luck and can pour yourself into tidy, predetermined molds. If you can't, you have to bust your ass working for others in jobs where the color of your skin isn't threatening, or sweat for yourself. Welcome to America.

My dad owned a deli in New York in the eighties, but the commute drained family time. He wanted to be around us more, so he and my mom decided to open up one of the only Thai restaurants in Jersey at the time, a ten-minute drive from our home. It started out as a deli, Asian grocery, and restaurant, which they labeled Thai-Chinese, for fear that no one would know what Thai food was. The place could seat only about two dozen people at first, a few mismatched chairs and tables set among shelves of fish sauces and coconut milk and Pocky and dried mango. He named it something neither Thai nor Chinese, in case he needed to pivot in any direction: Four Seasons. It stood out in the strip mall.

I don't think having their ten-year-old son as a dishwasher was part of my parents' dream, but as with so many small businesses, the gravity of those walls can be hard to escape. I was there, my sister was there, and so was my mom, who handled the front of house and finances and always wore custom-made clothes that lent the space a regalness, along with the portraits of King Bhumibol the Great and King Chulalongkorn.

We're lucky no inspector ever stuck their head in the back while I scrubbed pots. It felt Dickensian but, you know, in a fun way—unlike a Victorian chimney sweep, I was working by choice. And I got to hang with my dad and witness his charm and his temper, his toughness and his generosity, up close.

If you knew my dad and needed to find him, you had to go to the restaurant. He was always there. It's where friends visited. Accountants. Neighbors. Even relatives in Thailand didn't bother calling the house. Including his only sister. She rang the restaurant one day in the spring of 1993 to tell him their mother had passed away. It was at the end of the lunch rush. He sat on the bags of rice, stacked neatly at the front of the grocery. I had never seen him cry before. I sat next to him. He put his arm around me. Those bags of rice had never felt harder.



The author and his father in Thailand in 1988, a year before they would work side by side in a restaurant.

A few days later, he would leave for Bangkok to attend the funeral. It would be one of the few days off he ever gave himself.

"Take care of your mother," I remember him telling me. "This is yours."

What started as a way to be near my parents, to see them in a grown-up world so that I could understand my own life, was turning into life itself.

CHAPTER THREE

I Am Rewarded with a Promotion

By the time sixth grade rolled around, I looked like I could play JV football. My parents saw my sprouting as an opportunity to have another friendly face up front to explain the difference between green and red curry to guests, so I was given a pad and pen and sent out to the dining room to wait tables.

"Have you ever been to Thailand?" people would ask me. Back then, white people who had been to Thailand would love to tell you that they'd been to Thailand. "Yes, it's *huuumid,*" was my canned response. Not really a joke. I approximate my laugh rate at 50 percent.

Growing up Asian in a town that was predominantly white meant dealing with what we now know as microaggressions and what I knew back then as bullshit that made me angry but that you couldn't really punch someone over. *Were you born here? Where are you from? Your English is so good.* In school, you would explain what kind of Asian you were to those who were curious. Usually it was in the context of, no, you weren't Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, or Filipino. My mom's family emigrated from China to Thailand, so I was technically half Thai and half Chinese, but try explaining the intricacies of this to folks who can't spell *diaspora.*

The restaurant was a less charged environment. Occasionally I encountered people who wanted to tell me that my parents' food wasn't "authentic," on one hand, or those who expected egg rolls and duck sauce, on the other, but in general it was a relief to talk about my Thai-ness in a way that didn't make me feel like an alien in the country where I was born.

I think my dad felt the same. He was able to surround himself with people who understood him and who could speak his mother tongue. And man, he loves to curse. Imagine a Samuel L. Jackson but in Thai. Complaints about the spiciness of the food were met with "*Ai hiet*!" (asshole), the second syllable lovingly drawn out, like *sheeeeeeeit,* for full effect.

I'm not sure whether my dad thought it best for me to be there. I spent about half my school nights at the restaurant, some weekends, and what felt like all my summers. He placed a small table for me in the storage hallway, among boxes of coconut milk and tamarind paste, a kind of homework hideout.

I'm also not sure whether my dad intended to work as much as he did. It's easy to try to twist his story into the timeworn narrative about a father working hard to provide for his family or the romantic chef finding his passion, but it's more complicated than that. I think he felt a sense of purpose and community at the restaurant as much as it was an escape in every other way an armchair psychologist could think of.

PROP STYLING: MIAKO KATOH (POT AND SNEAKERS). COURTESY AUTHOR (AUTHOR AND FATHER).

Whatever the reasons, one result was that for nearly all of my adolescence, we never took a family vacation. Only once, when I was in third grade, did we take a trip together, to Thailand. It was a chance to connect with family–the cousins and uncles my sister and I had seen only in pictures. It would be our last family trip for a dozen years.

It was the first time my father had seen his dad in more than two decades. My mom's parents had passed away years before. (I remember seeing her open the blue onionskin-thin airmail letter from her sister telling her that their father had died. I could hear her weep in the bedroom. Her relatives hadn't called so she wouldn't be tempted to leave the U. S.; her green-card status would have made reentry difficult.) Back in Thailand now, she took us to see the hospital her father had built. We heard stories of how, as the area's only doctor, he made house calls on horseback. I began to understand the pain of her feeling trapped in the U. S., in the town meant to be her new home, where the only other faces that looked like hers for miles were her husband's and her children's.

CHAPTER FOUR

I Am Tempted with an Extraordinary Gift

"I'd like to talk to you, son," my dad said. "Sit down." We were at the bar in my family's newly opened second restaurant. It was before dinner, CNN was on the television, and some takeout orders were waiting to be picked up. I was a senior in high school.

"Vassar. No one's heard of it," he said. "Go to a school that's famous."

I had to explain the illustriousness of the colleges I was interested in.

"You're good at art–you could be a plastic surgeon" was his argument for Johns Hopkins, which, as the most recognizably fancy school on the list, was naturally where he was nudging me.

And then he said, "Rutgers is a good school, you know?"

The campus was a short drive from the restaurants, my sister had gone there, and he had gotten to know professors who were regulars.

"If you go to Rutgers, I'll buy you a Porsche Boxster. And you can work here as a manager."

I told him I'd give it some thought.

"Forget the Boxster; ask for a 911," a friend suggested.

Many immigrant parents sacrifice so their kids can pursue their dreams. Sometimes this comes with full acceptance, whether that child chooses to become a mechanic or go to law school. Sometimes there's partial acceptance. Sometimes there's none. But this was something else.

My dad had built a business that he was proud of. It was a small piece of Thailand, thousands of miles away, and I think he started to like the idea of this being his legacy. A family business.

That summer, my parents told me that they would be going to Thailand for vacation after my graduation. Without me. I was going to have to help manage the restaurants. *Um, okay?* I was genuinely happy that they were finally taking the time to enjoy themselves. But yeah, there went my summer.

I had always understood that running a restaurant was less about the food and more about everything else, but it *really* is about everything else. Dealing with a broken HVAC system. Employees not showing up. Paying vendors. Remembering to eat. Remembering not to eat too much. Getting sleep.

The stress was real. I gained the freshman fifteen even before getting to college. I wasn't built for the hours and the marathon-like energy that it entailed.

I told my dad I'd decided to go to Hopkins. I'm sure it was bittersweet for him. He had a son going to a college he could easily name-drop but lost a scion. I graduated, moved to New York, and left my parents' business to them.

CHAPTER FIVE

I Discover a Long-Lost "Brother"

One of my favorite things to do with my father as a kid was to ride into New York's Chinatown on Saturday mornings to pick up meat, fish, produce, and other supplies for the restaurant. I would help heave large buckets of tofu onto the van from a place on Worth Street. He would look over the fish atop ice in sidewalk stalls–he taught me to look at the clarity of the eyes for freshness. If there was time, we'd sit down for dim sum before heading back to Jersey.

One Saturday when I was in my early twenties, my mom asked me to ride with my dad again. One of the employees who usually managed these pick-ups with him was out. My mom didn't want him to go alone, as he was recovering from a surgery. *Sharing some dim sum with him again would be great,* I thought. We headed out at 5:00 A.M.

"Is this your son?" one of the Chinatown vendors asked, looking over my face and then my dad's. I introduced myself, shook his hand. "I normally see your brother," he told me. I gave him a confused, nervous laugh. He gave me a confused, nervous laugh, then asked, "How come you're never here?" My dad explained that I worked at a magazine in the city. There was more small talk, which I muted momentarily because this was a heavy package: My father was introducing his employee, some dude fresh from Thailand, as his son.

We got the dim sum to go. He let me drive the van back. I couldn't get a straight answer about why he was telling people this man was his son.

You know those charts that they put in kids' rooms to help them name their feelings? I was hitting all the darker ones simultaneously: angry, confused, tired, scared, insecure. I called my dad a liar at exit 13. By exit 10, our exit, I was calmer. *Jai yen,* I thought to myself. It's what my dad used to say to me when my temper flared, like his. It literally means "cool heart."

"You can't do that," I said. "I'm your only son."

CHAPTER SIX

On the Enduring Mysteries of Family

If you were a kid with Asian parents in America in the past year, you perhaps worried more about them than at any other point in your life. I did. My Instagram feed became a stream of security-camera footage of senseless racist violence against Asian elders. My parents didn't have the benefit of sheltering in place and running the kitchen from home. They were still insisting on heading in, even before their vaccinations. Just as my dad had had to sleep in the restaurant that night long ago, I needed to be near them and at the place where their Asian-ness was most front and center. Even if it meant just sitting around eating chicken satay and talking about PPP loans.

Existing as an Asian in America oscillates between having the privilege of not being threatened for the body that you're in and suddenly dealing with a spectrum of mild to hellish racist acts and realizing that the privilege is false. There's a lot worse going on in this country, but the system, this society, is not really made to help you. For better or for worse, you have to build it and own it to have a real seat at the table.

I used to wonder whether my parents had given me too much freedom to pursue my artsy joie de vivre. There are some nights when, after I've read to my kids, the *what-ifs* linger. Should I have become a restaurant manager? Stayed in Jersey? Taken the Porsche? But then I remember that I have no memories of my parents reading to me. They didn't have the energy at the end of the day. I couldn't step through that door that my dad left open, and he knew that, too, even if it meant that we don't know each other as well as we could. Plus, I can't even get my children to brush their teeth. It's easy to forget: Kids have minds of their own.

I'm proud of what my parents managed to build. They own everything–the walls, the land. I barely own this story. Still, my dad's passions have manifested in me in a way that neither of us could have imagined. I mean, I write about restaurants and bars. And I work too much. Such is the messiness of parenthood. You can only make a series of choices, hopefully virtuous, or at least none that require a ton of therapy, and yield to that raw and imperfect legacy over time.

I try to bring my two daughters, five and nine, to my parents' home and their restaurants as often as I can. On the way in the car, my little one often asks, "Are we going to Thailand?" The first time she asked, I said, "No, maybe next year," before realizing–she means the restaurants. "Yes," I say now. "Yes, we are."

what i've learned

Tim McGraw

MUSICIAN, 54, *Nashville*

Interview by MADISON VAIN

_**YOU CAN BE** a great singer, have great songs, be a great performer—and it still might not happen.

_**I GRADUATED SECOND** in my high school class. I was in prelaw in college. And then I discovered playing guitar. I finally had to make a phone call to my mom and say, "I'm going to drop out of college, sell everything I have, and move to Nashville." I said that wincing, expecting a rebuke, but got "If you don't do it, you'll always regret it."

_**PEOPLE ASK ME,** "How could you have a relationship with your father? You were growing up in nothing. He was a millionaire baseball player. He knew you were there, and he didn't do anything." But when I found out Tug McGraw was my dad, it gave me something in my little town in Louisiana, something that I would have never reached for. How could I ever be angry?

_**MONEY DOESN'T SOLVE** all the problems, but I'd rather have problems than not have money. As bad as that sounds.

_**I REMEMBER A** moment when I was getting out of bed and going to the liquor cabinet and taking a big shot at 8:00 in the morning and thinking, *I have to wake the kids up.* I went straight to my wife and said, "This is where I'm at." I was scared. She just grabbed me and hugged me and changed my life.

_**I DIDN'T KNOW LOVE** could feel so good. Was it an emotion? Was it a lifestyle? Was it an imaginary thing? But love is all of those things.

_**AND LOVE IS** being angry. Love is not talking for a day. Love is getting in each other's face. Love is accepting that I'm wrong. Love is a 360 degree thing. It's not linear.

_**GROWING UP WITH** my mom and two sisters and now with my wife and three daughters, you would think my patience would be further down the road than it is.

_**MY WIFE ALWAYS** says, "You're not scared of anything." I say, "Ehhh, one thing. I'm looking at it right now."

_**MOST TIMES, WHEN** Faith and I go to a party, they're catered. When people come to our house, they're like, "You guys actually cooked this?" I say, "We've been cooking all day!"

_**THEY ALWAYS SAY** you're not supposed to fight in front of your kids. Everybody fights in front of their kids. That's part of the deal.

_**MOST OF THE TIME,** I find when I second-guess my gut, it doesn't work. Or if I get too much advice from too many people, it doesn't work. Now, my gut doesn't always work, either.

_**WHEN I READ** the *Friday Night Lights* script, I called up Pete Berg, who directed it, and he didn't know me from Adam. He told me he'd already cast the part with another musician. I went and did my audition. We had to go to Paris, and as soon as we got in the hotel room, the phone rang. It was Billy Bob Thornton: "I just got a call from Pete Berg, who said, 'Some country singer just came in here and blew me away.'" It was a good vote of confidence. But on the other hand, I was like, *How the hell don't you know who I am?*

_**EGO ALWAYS BORES** me. So I'm sure I bore people on occasion.

_**THERE ARE A** handful of songs that come along where you know that when you do it, no one can hear anybody else doing it.

_**SOMETIMES GOD JUST** walks through the room, and you happen to be standing there. E

They say you're not supposed to FIGHT *in front of your kids.*

_**MY OLDEST DAUGHTER** wanted to move to L.A. It was tough. But I was 18 or 19 wanting to move to Nashville. How can I say, "Well, I did it, but you can't"?

_**BLIND FAITH IS** not true faith. Asking questions and constantly dissecting faith—and still having faith? That represents a truer faith.

_**EVERYBODY FORGETS THAT** it's your personal relationship with your god. Everybody wants to infringe on your personal relationship.

_**STRUCTURE CREATES FREEDOM.** If you don't have any structure, what you think is freedom is really chaos.

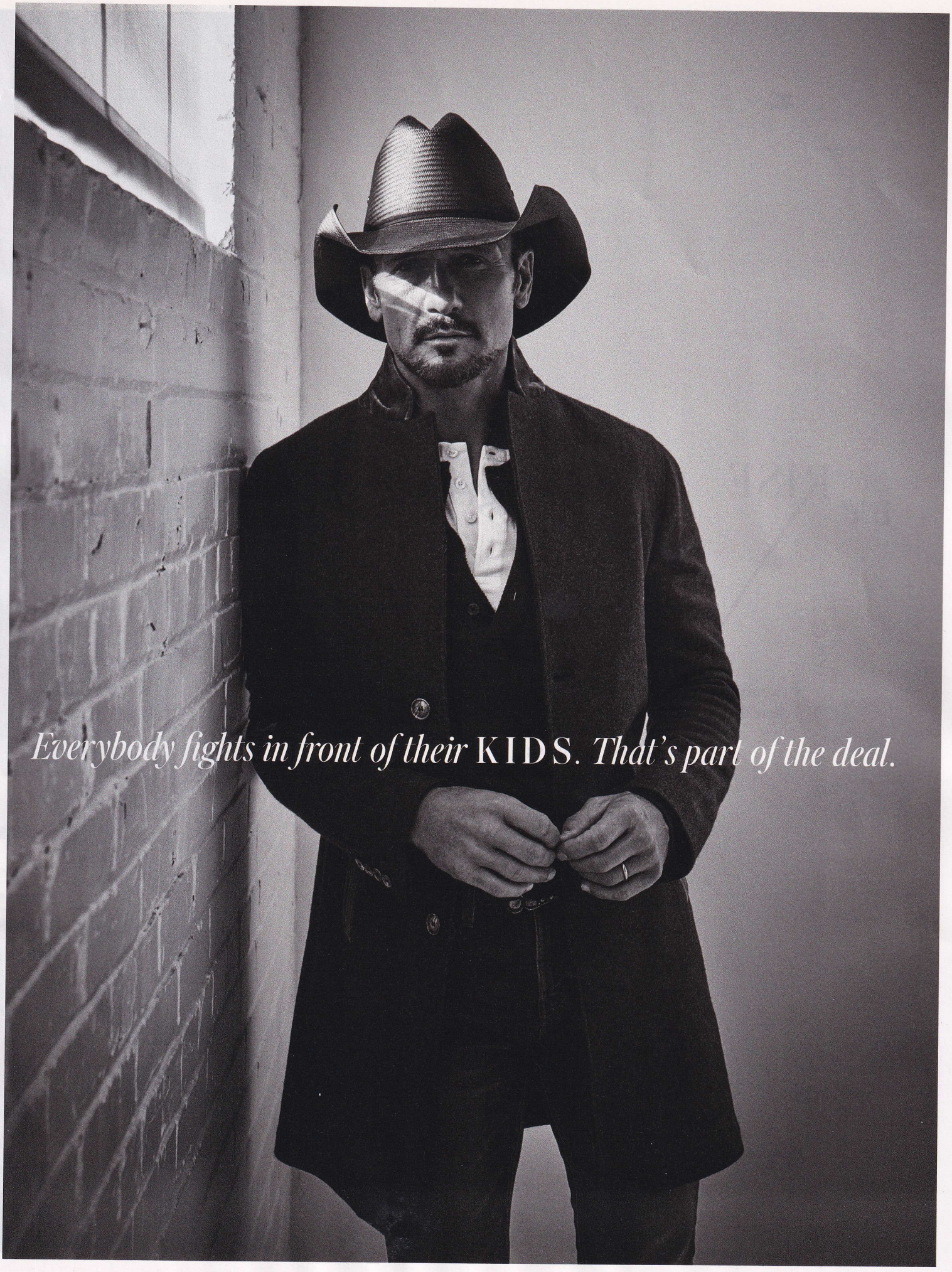
_**FAITH'S TAUGHT ME** a lot about setting tables. She cracks that whip on that.

_**I CAN'T STAND** to eat before a show. I want to feel like this hungry lion that's on the prowl.

_**I DON'T PAY** very much for my cowboy hats. I wear a black straw hat made by Resistol. It takes about three shows to really sweat through it to fall into place and start looking good. And then I'll wear it three months longer than I should just because I don't want to break in a new one.

_**WE'RE ALL IN** this together. You don't have to pussyfoot around with me.

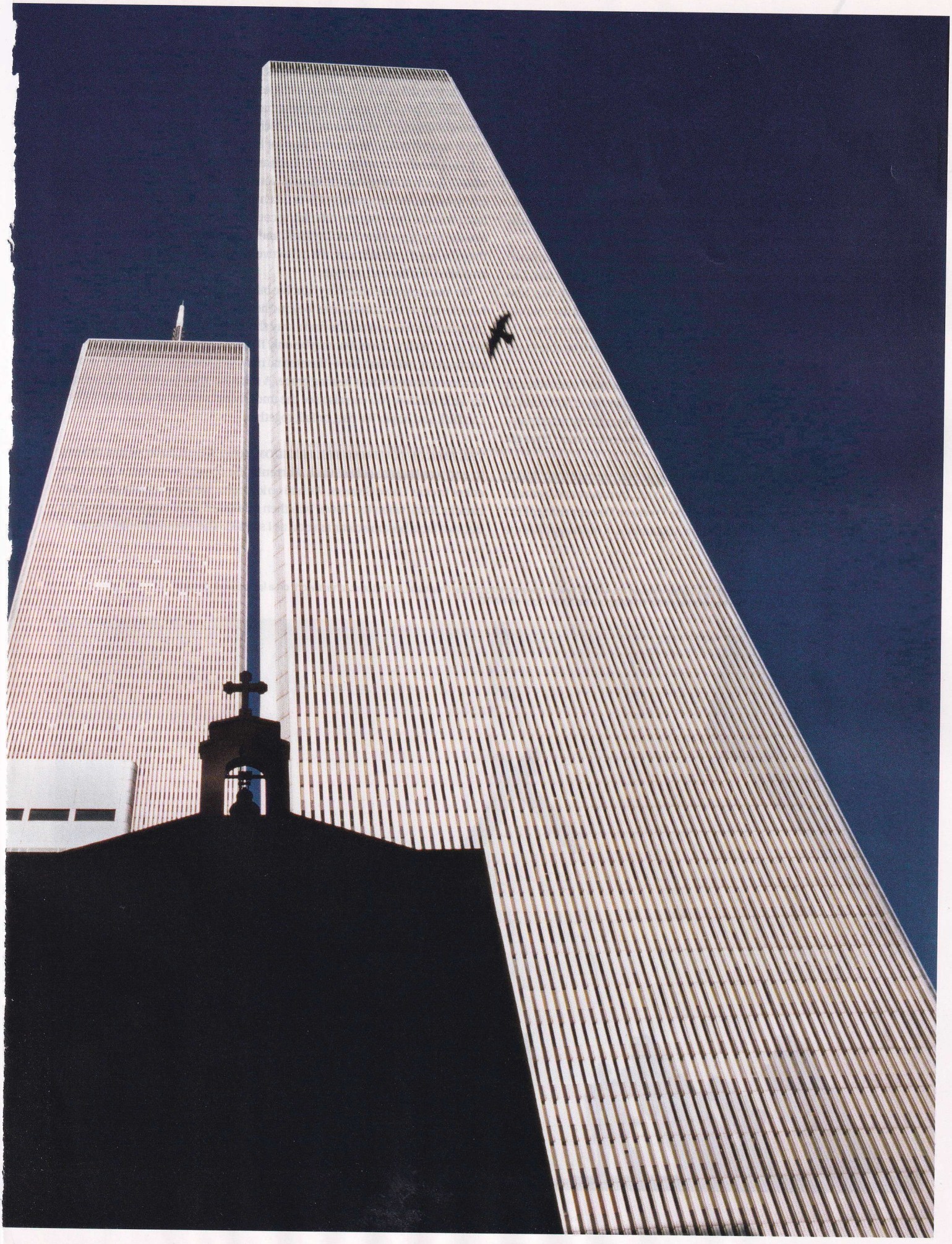
DAVID NEEDLEMAN/AUGUST IMAGE


Everybody fights in front of their KIDS. *That's part of the deal.*

we RISE *together* *or* FALL

Twenty years after the Twin Towers came down, the nation grapples with a new collective grief. Esquire's SCOTT RAAB, who covered the decade-long effort to raise One World Trade, argues that the American spirit is stronger than the forces that try to tear us apart.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
HENRY LEUTWYLER



"THERE IS A BEAUTY THAT REMAINS WITH US AFTER WE'VE STOPPED LOOKING."

CORY RICHARDS,
PHOTOGRAPHER AND EXPLORER, WEARS THE
VACHERON CONSTANTIN OVERSEAS.

VACHERON CONSTANTIN
GENÈVE

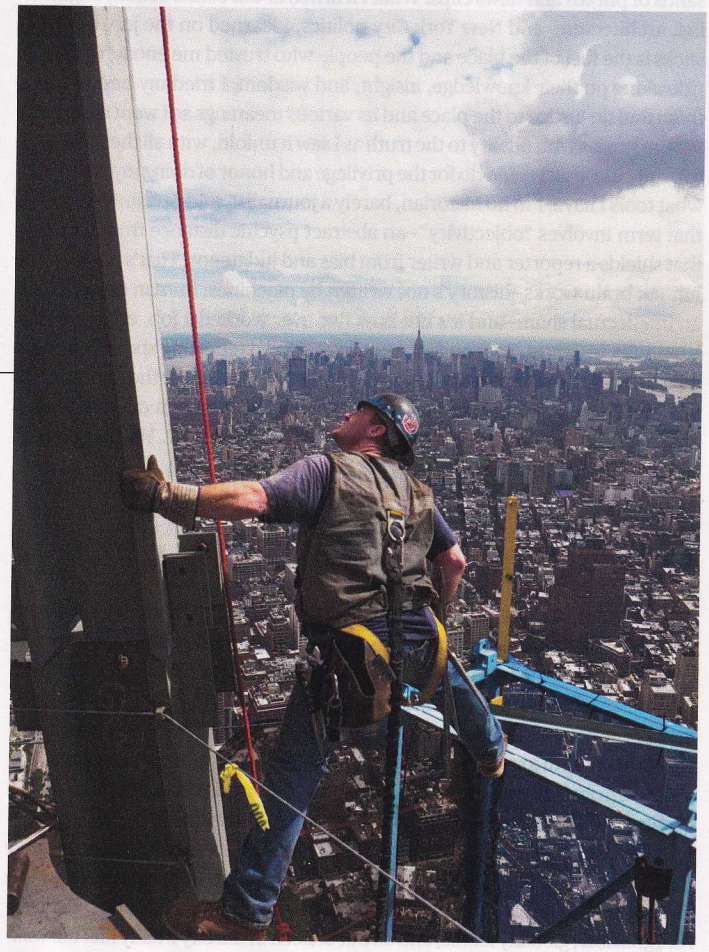
ONE OF
NOT MANY.

the World Trade Center, was not going to grant us access to the site, its plans, or its decision makers; and actual construction of the Freedom Tower would not begin for…no one knew. Months, for sure. This turned out to be a lucky break. I had time to start reading about the complicated histories of the site, the Port Authority itself, and the building of the Twin Towers. We were obsessed with the sheer complexity of erecting a building so tall, and the task of doing it at a place still flooded with meaning and fiery with emotion. The meaning and emotion made the story worth writing; what worried me, a guy whose Cro-Magnon manual skills don't go beyond lefty-loosey righty-tighty, was trying to understand and to explain in words all it took to literally build the damn thing from bedrock to 1,776 feet.

As for access, we caught an even luckier break: Dara McQuillan, who works for Silverstein Properties, the site's developer. Without his yes, with no foot inside the door, I had no chance to close the deal. Dara understood my mission–to write an accurate, truthful history of the rebuilding, more or less as it happened. I never pulled one punch, and Dara never gave me grief but once, when I referred to Larry Silverstein's continual portrayal in the New York City print media as "the Fagin of Fifth Avenue," and that's only because Dara's Ireland born and bred, and so has read many, many books. His generosity and faith in Esquire's mission were absolutely crucial.

FIVE YEARS OF ESQUIRE STORIES GREW INTO TEN. I WORKED THE rebuilding story every which way: on the site, on the phone, on the road, or in a source's office or a coffee shop for an interview. I can't honestly tell you that reporting is hard work–try selling shoes–but it does take a certain set of skills common to spycraft and stalking. I broke news once in a while–when the Port Authority decided to officially rechristen the Freedom Tower as One World Trade Center, and when former New York governor George Pataki had a three-foot-tall model of the Freedom Tower built for him to tote around the country in 2008 as he raised money for what became a stillborn presidential run.

The Port Authority and George Pataki denied these relatively meaningless truths, by the way. This is one of the great truisms of journalism and society, and not merely in our time and place: Never, ever, under any circumstances, trust any politician or spokesperson to place the truth above their own best interests. Because I had the unique luxury of spending ten years on one story, and the support of a great magazine, I built a body of knowledge and a network of sources to depend upon and trust. I could also judge without worry the sorry parade of Ground Zero-adjacent politicians who came and went–Pataki and Giuliani and Spitzer and Bloomberg and Cuomo and Christie among them–kings for a day, building little beyond their own personal empires.



ten YEARS, *ten* STORIES, *one* BOOK

You'd be forgiven for thinking that *Once More to the Sky* is a book about a building—the Freedom Tower, a $4 billion monument to sweat, stamina, and union labor, scything through ten years of setbacks and infighting to loom 1,776 feet over New York City. Yet at its heart, *Once More to the Sky*, from which this article was adapted, is a book about people, in all their venality, imperfection, and generosity. In these ten riveting stories, originating in Esquire and collected together for the first time, along with never-before-seen photos, Scott Raab traces the human saga behind the colossal rebuilding at One World Trade Center. From the backroom dealing of real estate tycoons to the Herculean efforts of construction workers, the devastation of a city to the healing of a nation, *Once More to the Sky* captures a collective grief and a collective triumph. It reminds us that we're better together—a vision we need now more than ever.

Ten years, ten long stories—hundreds of hours of recorded interviews, thousands of photos and news clips. What I learned about construction, engineering, architecture, and New York City politics, I learned on the job, but what sticks is the feel of the place and the people who trusted me enough to let me ride along on their knowledge, insight, and wisdom. I tried my best to repay them and do justice to the place and its various meanings as I went along, telling the stories with fidelity to the truth as I saw it unfold, with all the feelings fit to print—the least I could do for the privilege and honor of doing my share with what tools I have. I'm no historian, barely a journalist, and certainly not one if that term involves "objectivity"—an abstract psychic distance from the story that shields a reporter and writer from bias and judgment. That's not how the human brain works—history's not written by machines; human objectivity is an intellectual sham—and it's not how I've ever worked a job, especially the World Trade Center. To spend ten years writing and reporting about that patch of land did not make me less passionate about the place; quite the opposite. On a planet soaked in blood and suffering, Ground Zero was an open wound, a void, a nullity embodied by its emptiness. It is healed now. Yet the scar still speaks to me, and always will.

FUNNY,

IN A NEW YORK CITY WAY, BUT THOSE TOWERS WERE DIStinctly unloved before crashing to earth, neither admired nor respected by the critical arbiters of the 1970s. Lewis Mumford saw "purposeless giantism"; Ada Louise Huxtable dismissed them as "General Motors Gothic"; Jane Jacobs called the WTC urban "vandalism," and not for nothing, these narrow, redundant towers upthrust from a so-called superblock, hedged by lesser, duller buildings that turned through streets into dead ends to form a barren concrete plaza shredded in cold weather by vortices of bitter Hudson River wind.

In life, they were at once impossible to miss and, to those living in and around the city, invisible. The Twin Towers were there and not there—seen a thousand times a year in movies and television shows, in millions of photos, instantly recognizable, globally iconic, and all but unseen in the city's daily life: tall wallpaper; the towers served as a compass in the downtown sky, an isolated destination for office drones and tourists only. There they stood—fewer than thirty years—until the morning of 9/11.

That day, across the planet, two billion people watched the news and saw them gashed and burning, then collapsing—vanished into gales of dust. Countless millions of Americans tuned in live on TV as the helicopters circled over the human beings atop the towers, scores of whom, trusting gravity to spare them the fire, arced to their deaths. It was reality TV, an endless sunlit nightmare of carnage inescapable, unbearable.

And yet the plainest historical lesson of 9/11 was quickly obvious: New York City would overcome, prevail, abide. Within days of the attack, the politicians, the landlord, and the tenant were dueling for power over the rebuilding and the billions of relief and recovery dollars that would flow—business as usual in New York City. The bustle paused while the city and the sky went literally silent, but never the hustle, not here. There was no shame or falsity in that; the shock, outrage, grief, and fear following that sudden and vast destruction and death were no less real; there was even a certain reassurance: The towers were down, but the city was standing, the pigeons were pooping, and the power brokers were busy angling for an edge. Wall Street reopened for trading by September 17. George W. Bush asked a wary citizenry to keep the faith and keep shopping, lest the terrorists win.

In and around New York City, the grief hit hard and lasted, and the fear ramped up beyond anything the city had felt after the WTC was truck-bombed in 1993, killing seven people. The scale of human loss and the immensity of destruction on 9/11 were indeed terrifying, so the fear was fixed upon whether more attacks were imminent; there was never any fear that New York itself had been fatally wounded in substance or spirit, no doubt that we'd survive, rebuild, and thrive—none. Eight million people in the five boroughs, twenty-plus million in the megalopolis, the cold heart of capitalism, complete with a $2-trillion-plus GDP and more billionaires than anywhere else in the world, not to mention the secular capital of everything sublime—and satanic—in the worship of dollars, culture, and pastrami: New York doesn't bluff, fold, or bet against itself.

And so twenty years later, as forensic scientists still parse bone dust, still search for DNA clues in the remains of hundreds of victims not yet identified,

ADAPTED FROM **ONCE MORE TO THE SKY: THE REBUILDING OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER**, BY SCOTT RAAB AND JOE WOOLHEAD, PUBLISHED BY SIMON & SCHUSTER, INC. PRINTED BY PERMISSION. EPILOGUE COPYRIGHT © 2021 BY SCOTT RAAB.

whose kin still hope for whatever closure may come, and as the "Tribute in Light" beams still pierce heaven dusk to dawn each 9/11–two brilliant blue-white shafts, ghosts of the departed icons, resurrected and heaven-bound, rising and revered–the work goes on. Another Silverstein-owned tower's on the way, plus a performing-arts center that's been more or less on hold for a full two decades. The creative genius and tragic flaw of humanity–our innate drive to build wedded to our urge to destroy–are not just visible here: They fill to bursting the eye–up close, they fill the cosmos–and the heart.

IF WE GOT *THAT* BASTARD DONE, WE CAN DO *ANYTHING*.

We.

The tensile strength of the city's spirit transcends the magnetic force of money, because it is forever replenished, refreshed, and inspired by those who come from other places. New York is where humanity has arrived for centuries, bringing new life–language, food, music, and hope, ambition, energy, and courage–to add to the most ethnically diverse populace anywhere. Our country's arms still open here. The citizens of scores of other nations died at Ground Zero on 9/11, and whether they sought this shore for any Lockean notion of liberty or just to freely chase a buck is beside the point: The courage and creative force they bring makes and keeps New York City true to the best of America's best dreams. Every newcomer redeems the covenant with our collective self–the same compact joined by our own ancestors who came as strangers and struggled and stayed to become Americans.

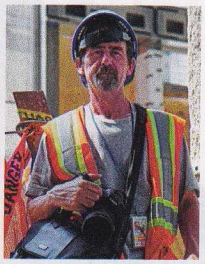
New York City is where that pioneer promise still gets kept. It was pure political silliness that inspired George Pataki to call it the "Freedom Tower," but seeing it shining down the harbor toward Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty doesn't register as patriotic kitsch. Here the New World still beckons, more real, more joyful, older and truer than any parchment under glass. These are living markers of a sacred love born of scripture and lived right here:

Welcome the stranger. Love thy neighbor. Post no bills.

Humans being human, these are aspirational precepts; the goal, in theory, is to strive to live up to them. New York City is tribal in the usual ways, divided by race and class, but with three million foreign-born denizens and a population density of twenty-seven thousand people per square mile, this is a place where the striving is a matter of daily practice on the streets. It works out, more or less, because the stress of making a go of life in a world capital requires enough effort without paying a lot of attention to other folks' business, and because a vast majority of humans–in New York City as elsewhere–are decent or better folk trying hard to get through the day with some measure of grace and absence of friction.

On 9/11, during the darkest hours of the most horrific day in the city's history, New Yorkers united with loving kindness, feeding and consoling one another, searching for the missing and gathering in reflection and prayer, enacting a loving community that finds its echo in the civic suffering of these days.

Nothing reveals and defines the soul of a community, or a country, more clearly than tough times. Now, twenty years after 9/11, as we face a collective grief, suffering, and outrage on a scale beyond anything we've known in our lives, the Freedom Tower's spire reminds me that nothing–no act of terrorism, no natural disaster, no pandemic: nothing–is stronger than the human spirit of community.



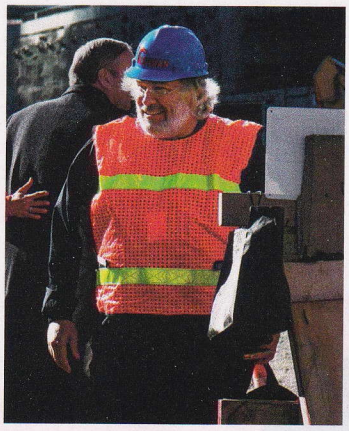
bearing WITNESS *to the* REBUILD

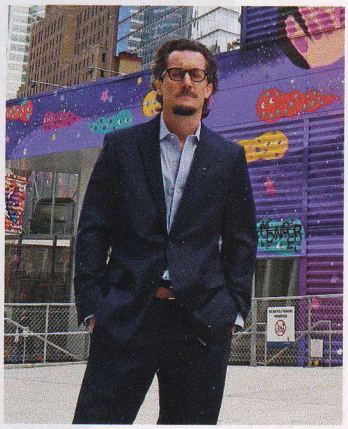
My first date with photographer Joe Woolhead was a four-hundred-mile drive to Portsmouth, Virginia, where the Freedom Tower steel I had seen rolled in Luxembourg was arriving to be fabricated before delivery to the World Trade Center. I was so transfixed by Joe's raving lust for Thin Lizzy that a Virginia trooper pulled us over and handed me the first and only speeding ticket I've ever gotten.

Next morning, Joe was a few minutes late for our departure, and I was having none of that, not on this job. "We," baby. Not you, not me: we.

I referred to him as "the putz with the camera" in one story—but by the time I wrote that, we were already friends. Joe's an Irishman; like so many who come from all over to give New York City their best shot, he's known tough times without ever giving up on himself or the world. Joe didn't give up on me, nor I on him—far from it. We got the Virginia job done and drove home hungry, to my house, and we ate dinner like a family, and that was all right in all the right ways. E. M. Forster wrote, "Only connect!" and that's still the basic rule of building human friendship and love—and stories, photos, and office towers.

Joe's a bighearted, honest man. His guerrilla style, founded on personal knowledge of doing construction work, put him in the trenches every workday, every month of every year. He's nimble, tireless, and never in the way. His photos of Ground Zero and the human army rebuilding those sixteen acres are a repository of American history and glorious illumination of the sole indisputable, absolute, and literal truth: Inch by inch, day by day, downtown has been reborn and New York City's sky reclaimed. Joe scrambled on-site in the first days in the toxic smoking pit; twenty years later—even now, at Covid o'clock—Joe's there shooting pictures. New York rats can't outwork Woolhead. —S. R.



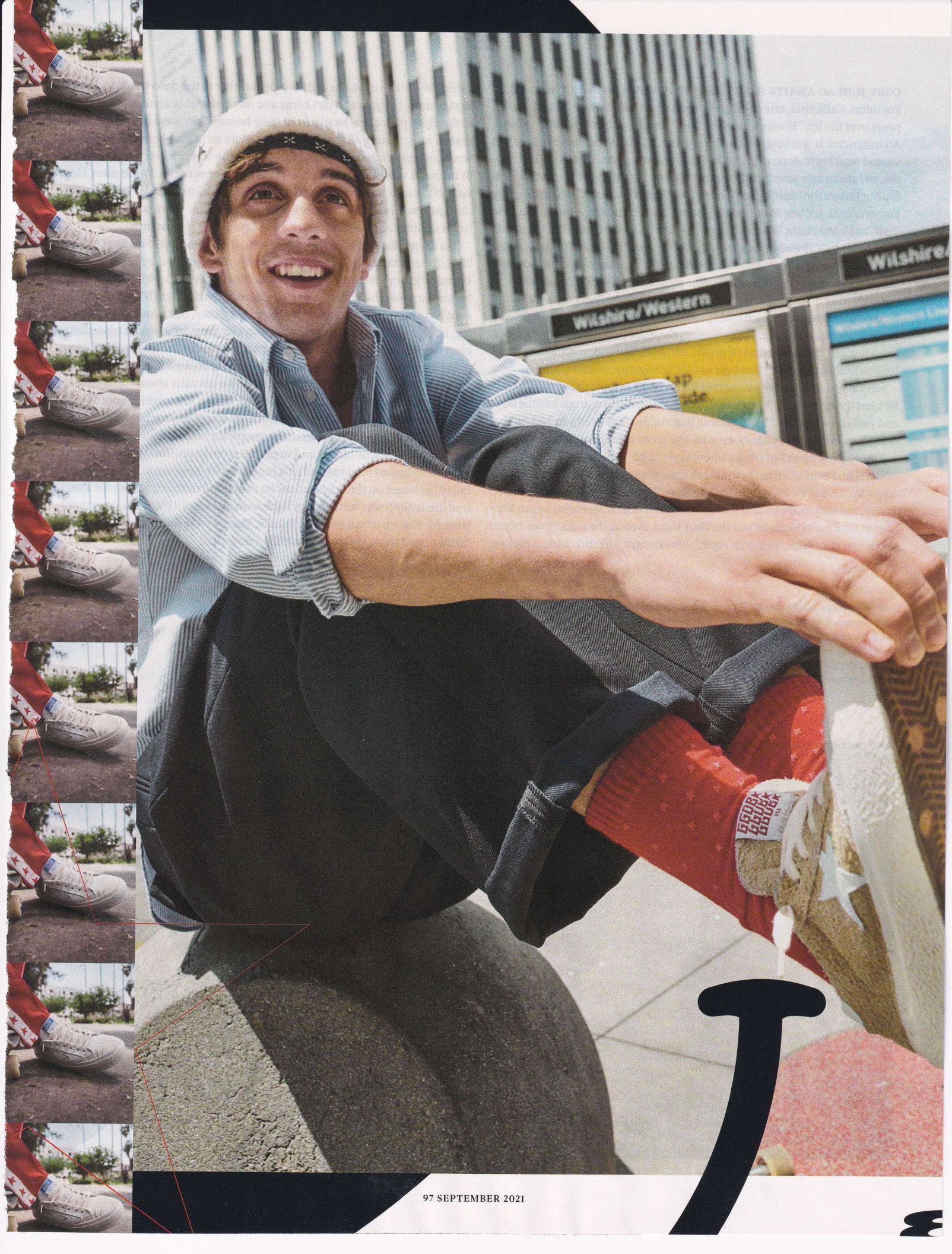


Opposite page: Ironworkers prepare to top out 1 WTC with the last section of the spire. Above, from left: Lathers build up a wall of rebar at 1 WTC, hemmed in by concrete form sections; Scott Raab at the signing of the first steel column to be picked and placed into the foundation of 1 WTC; the 1 WTC spire looking east to Brooklyn; Dara McQuillan of Silverstein Properties, outside 4 WTC.

on deck

Skateboarding at the Olympics? When CORY JUNEAU was growing up in southern California, the idea was laughable. Now it's reality, and he's an Olympian. Sick!

By Sarah Rense_ Photographs by Beau Grealy_ Styling by Taylor Brechtel


Wilshire/Western
Wilshire

CORY JUNEAU AWAITS HIS TURN IN THE BOWL AT A SKATE PARK IN Encinitas, California, one of his go-to spots when he's home in San Diego. He peers over the lip. "Homie's teaching the young locals how to skate," he says. An instructor is working with a kid—a grom, in skaterspeak—no older than six and wearing pads on every limb. The grom wipes out. This will take a minute, so Juneau kills time by riding along the bowl's perimeter. He lands a kickflip but fudges the heelflip that follows. "My legs are so sore," he says, slightly embarrassed. It's late May, and he just got back from competing in the Dew Tour, as in Mountain Dew, in Iowa, where he placed eighth. But it's no big deal, since he's already a lock for a spot on Team USA for the Tokyo Games.

Juneau, twenty-two, is known for his flowing style atop a skateboard and his seemingly effortless execution of the most difficult tricks. He prefers skating to walking. If he's walking, he might trip. He's ranked second in the world in park skateboarding, which takes place in what are essentially wonky swimming pools without water. Street skating, the more popular of the two styles, incorporates fixtures found in public settings, like stairways and cement ledges; both styles debut this year as official Olympic events.

Juneau will start training in earnest for his own Olympic debut soon. Today he's just trying to keep things mellow. When it's his turn, he drops into the bowl and pulls off a near-flawless frontside boardslide. "I'm pretty stoked on that one," he admits with a wide-open grin. The grom slides back in on his butt.

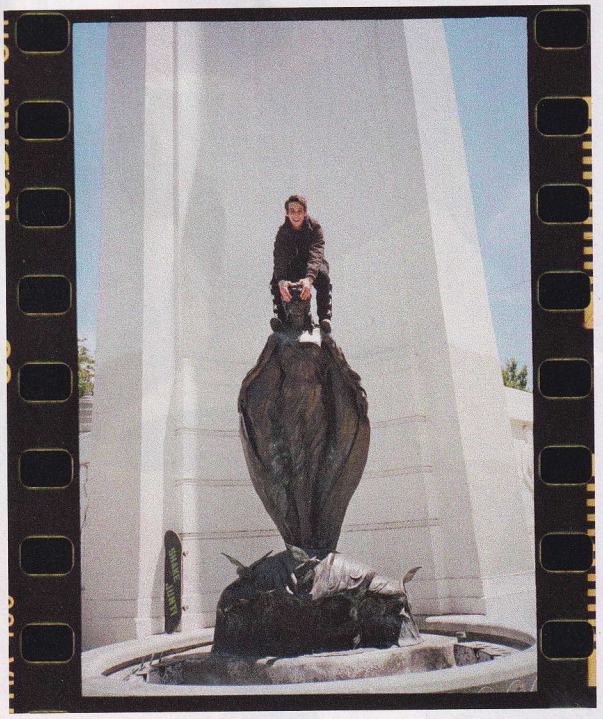
Juneau grew up in San Diego, where skate culture traces back six decades, and trekked to its skate parks to absorb greatness right out of the cement. He was surrounded by accomplished skaters—"legends," he calls them. Shaun White, the snowboarder and three-time Olympic gold medalist, began skating the local parks when he was six. Tony Hawk lives up the road. "I was taught when you do a trick, you do it right," Juneau says. His dad, Kirk, a lifelong surfer, would drive Juneau and his older brother to the desert each weekend to race dune buggies and dirt bikes and on weeknights accompanied them to the skate park a few blocks from their house. They were aggressive kids, Juneau says, skating all their anger out before returning home to do homework and crash into bed. He got hooked on the way the everyday anxieties in his head would clear out as he focused on new tricks. While most kids swarmed the street sections, ollieing down flights of stairs and grinding handrails, Juneau opted for the mostly kid-free half-pipe. He mastered it before he hit double digits. At thirteen, he was competing against pros.

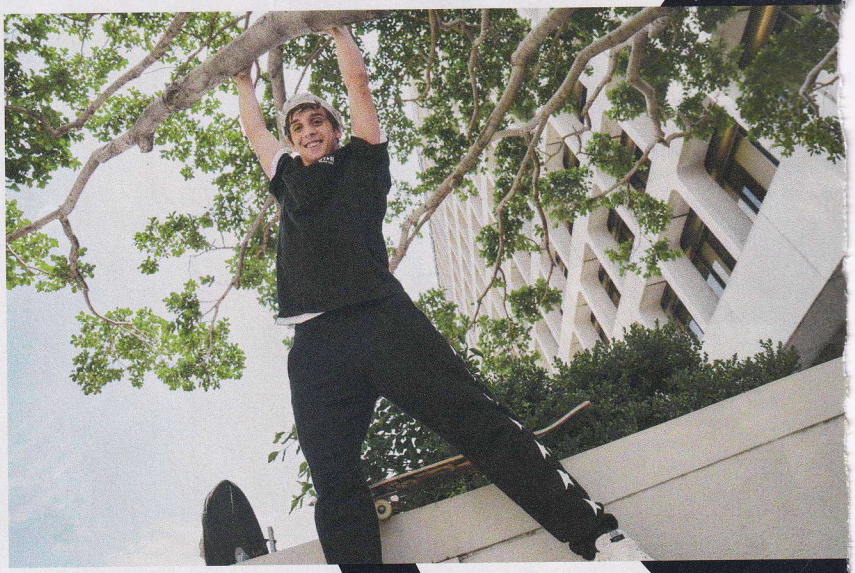
San Diego skate culture sticks with him. In the lead-up to competition in 2018, Juneau tested positive for THC and was suspended by the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency—the only Olympic skateboarder (so far) with that dubious honor. He swears he's been "trying to stay on the straight path" ever since. He even has a nutritionist, who advised he cut out gluten, dairy, and soy. It's working; he feels loads better. He probably won't hit the gym, since skateboarders can't stay flexible if they're jacked. He's sanguine about the international spotlight he's about to step into. As long as he puts in enough hours on his board ahead of time, he says, "there's nothing to be nervous about." The closest thing he has to a coach is his dad, who watches his competitions on TV and calls afterward to give him nonsense feedback like "Flip your board in the air."

In Encinitas, Juneau watches as the instructor holds a skateboard into the bowl like it's a rescue ladder and urges the grom to *one-two-three-jump!* and grab on so he can haul him out. It's Juneau's turn once again. He places the tail of his board on the lip, balances on the back truck, and hovers for a second, his lanky frame lost in baggy light-wash jeans and a black hoodie screenprinted with a portrait of Biggie Smalls. Then, in one fluid motion, he leans forward and chases his shadow straight down.

FOR STORE INFORMATION SEE PAGE 124. PRODUCTION: JOE DALY/A+ PRODUCTIONS. GROOMING: BRENT LAVETT FOR THE WALL GROUP USING L:A BRUKET.

Preceding page: Track pants ($270) and leather 1OF1 sneakers by **Golden Goose.** Shirt ($295), trousers ($390), suede 1OF1 sneakers, socks ($70), hat ($85), and bandanna ($85) by **Golden Goose.** This page, from left: Suede jacket ($1,200), sweatshirt ($270), and track pants ($270) by **Golden Goose.** Black T-shirt ($115), white T-shirt ($115), track pants ($270), hat ($85), and leather 1OF1 sneakers by **Golden Goose.** Opposite, clockwise from top: Blazer ($790), track jacket ($270), trousers ($390), suede 1OF1 sneakers, and hat ($95) by **Golden Goose.** Sweater ($395), T-shirt ($115), and bandanna ($85) by **Golden Goose.** Shorts ($295), leather 1OF1 sneakers, and socks ($85) by **Golden Goose.**





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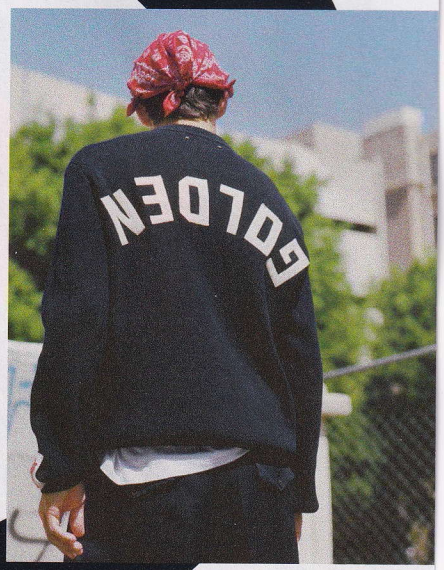
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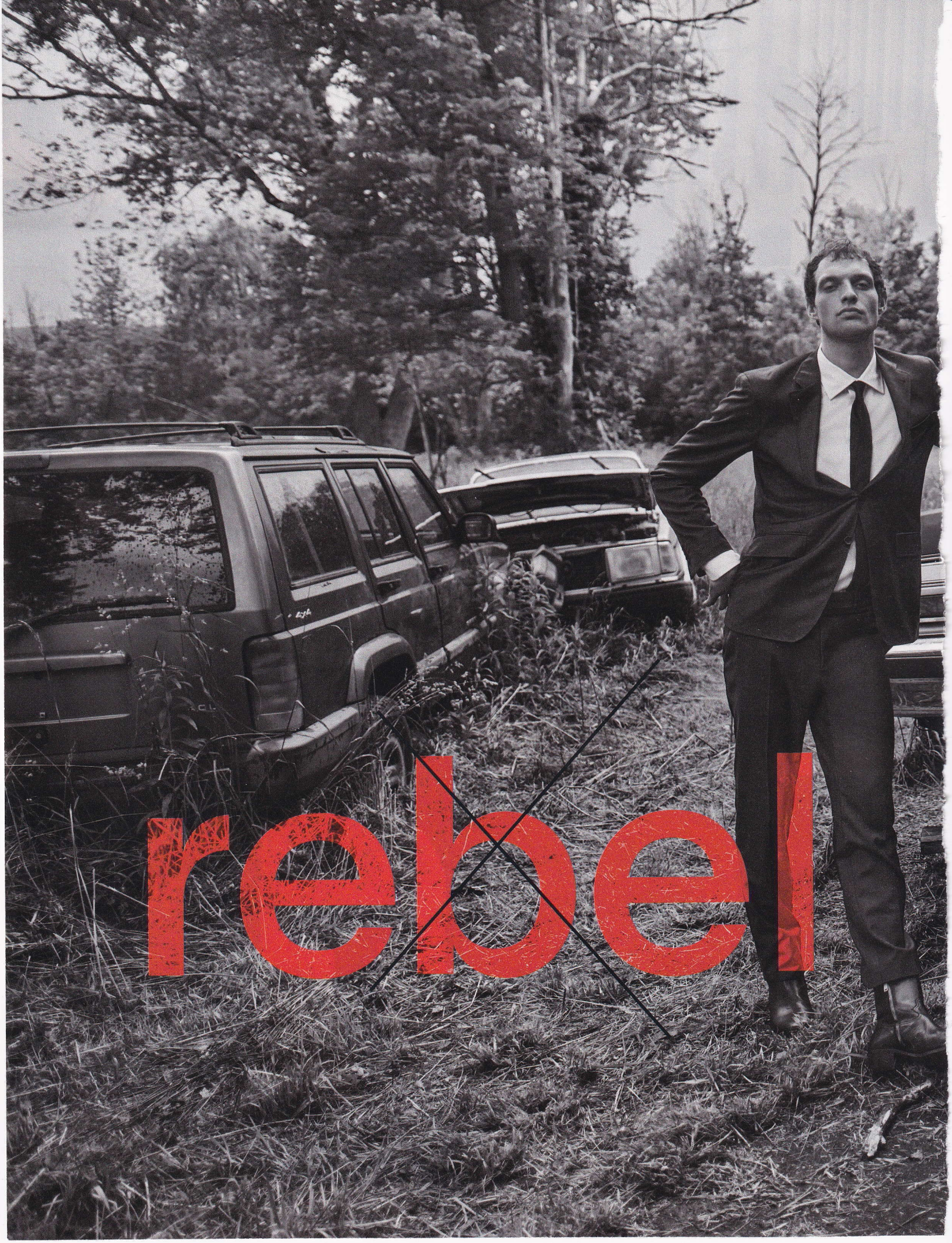
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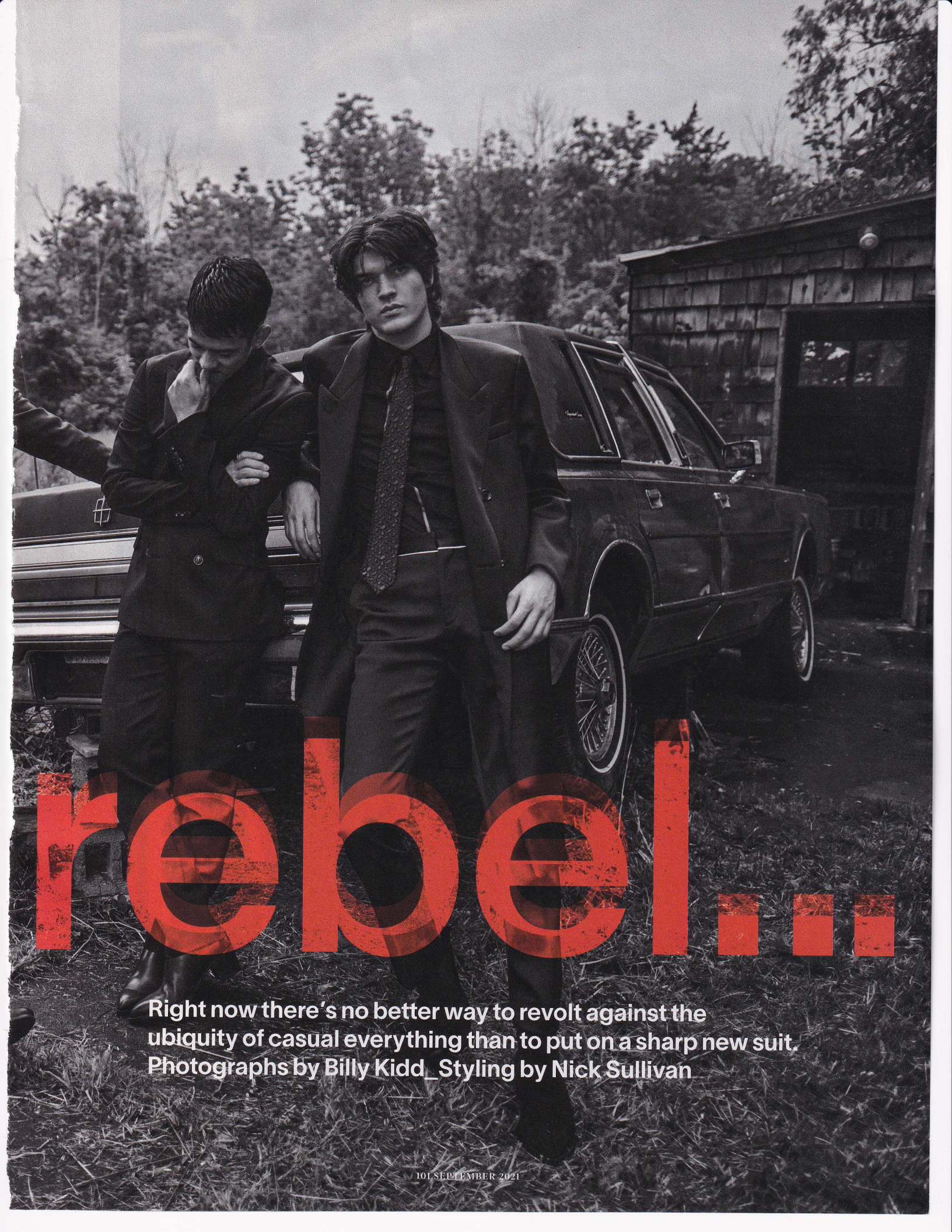
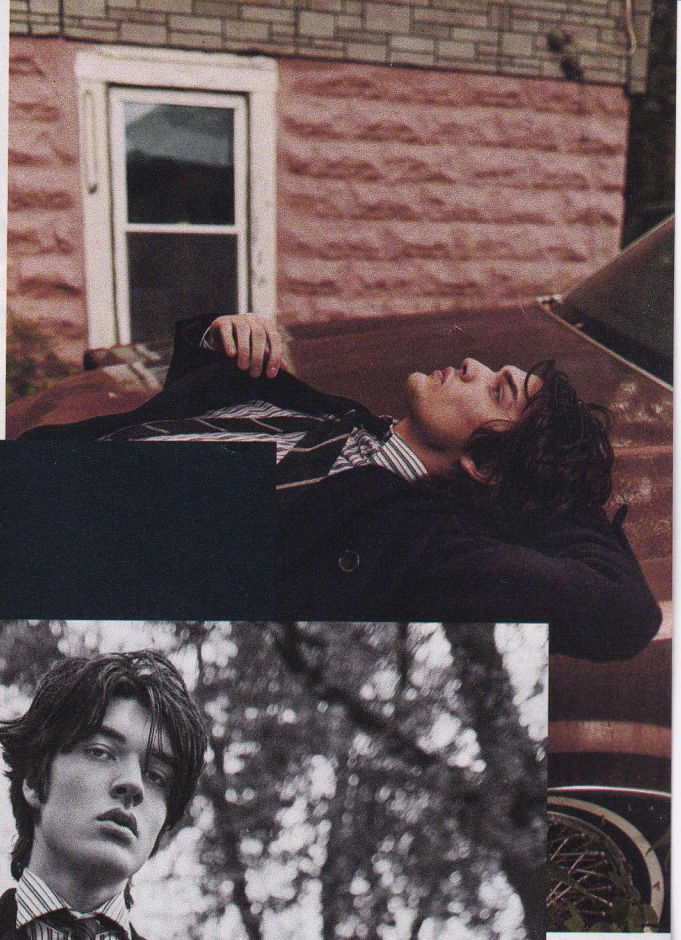


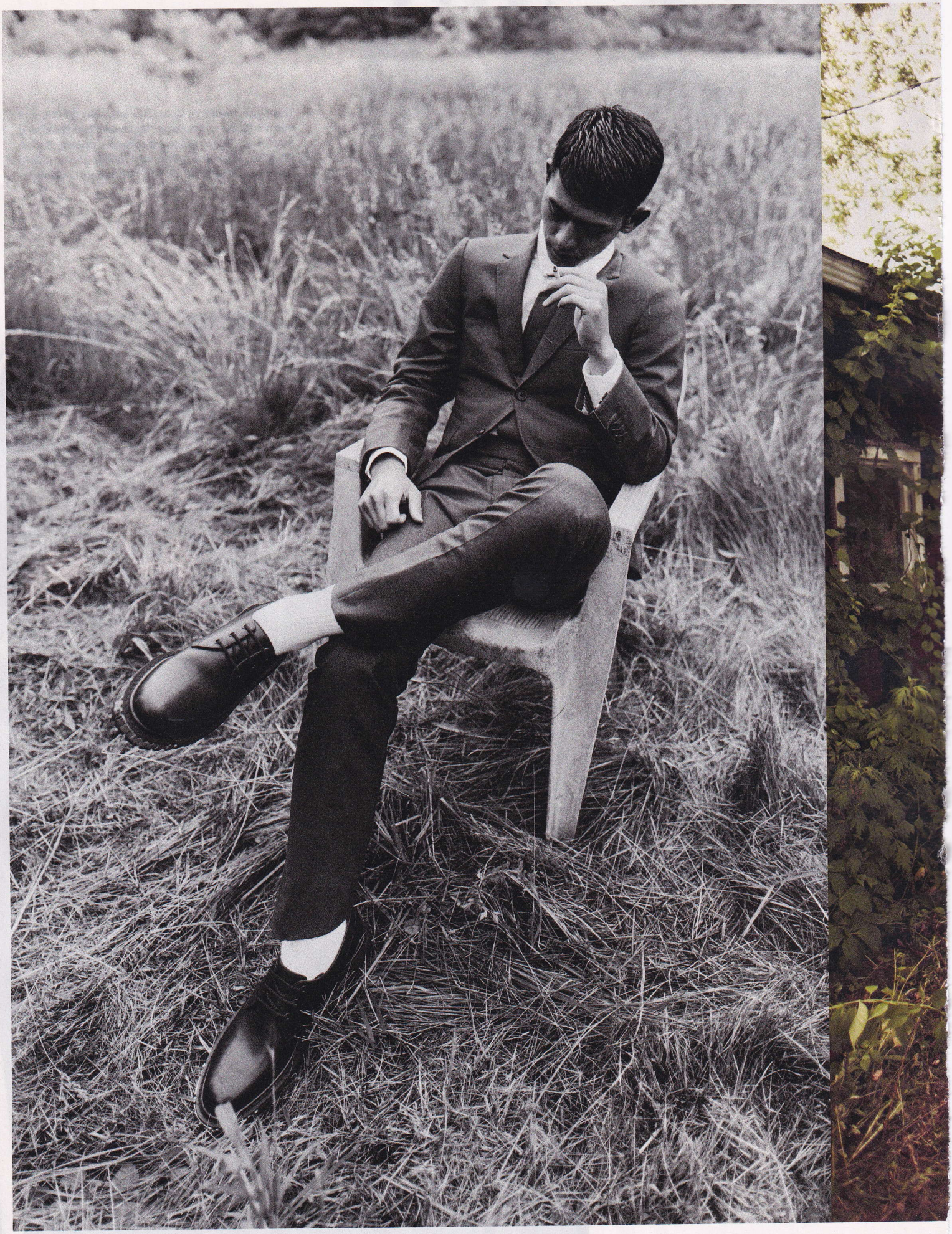
rebel...

Right now there's no better way to revolt against the ubiquity of casual everything than to put on a sharp new suit. Photographs by Billy Kidd_Styling by Nick Sullivan

Pages 100–101, from left: Suit ($2,360), shirt ($295), and tie ($96) by **Canali;** boots ($745) by **Golden Goose.** Jacket ($1,890), tank, and trousers ($1,090) by **Amiri;** boots ($1,095) by **Christian Louboutin.** Jacket ($2,650), shirt ($1,790), and trousers ($1,190) by **Fendi Men's;** tie ($25) by **Tie Bar;** boots ($890) by **Amiri.** This page: Coat ($6,995), shirt ($495), suit ($3,495), and tie ($235) by **Ralph Lauren.** Opposite: Jacket ($3,595, part of suit), tank ($195), and trousers ($1,145) by **Dolce & Gabbana;** boots ($850) by **Alexander McQueen;** Black Bay Ceramic watch ($4,725) by **Tudor.**



This page, from top: Coat ($3,980), shirt ($580), and trousers ($680) by **Alexander McQueen.** Tank ($195) and trousers ($1,145) by **Dolce & Gabbana.** Opposite: Jacket ($3,050), jumpsuit ($2,340), shirt ($805), and tie ($250) by **Prada;** boots ($1,195) by **Christian Louboutin.**



This page: Jacket ($1,950) by **Rhude;** shirt ($630) and trousers ($975) by **Salvatore Ferragamo;** tie by **Boss;** boots ($890) by **Amiri.**
Opposite: Suit and tie ($2,590, sold together) and shirt ($330) by **Thom Browne;** shoes ($990), **Celine by Hedi Slimane;** socks ($21) by **Falke.**

This page: Jacket ($3,100), shirt ($685), tie ($215), trousers ($1,070), and watch ($4,150) by **Louis Vuitton Men's;** shoes ($945) by **Manolo Blahnik;** socks ($21) by **Falke.** Opposite: Suit ($2,895) and tie ($245) by **Giorgio Armani;** shirt ($250) by **Eton;** boots ($1,195) by **Christian Louboutin;** sunglasses ($565) by **Jacques Marie Mage.**

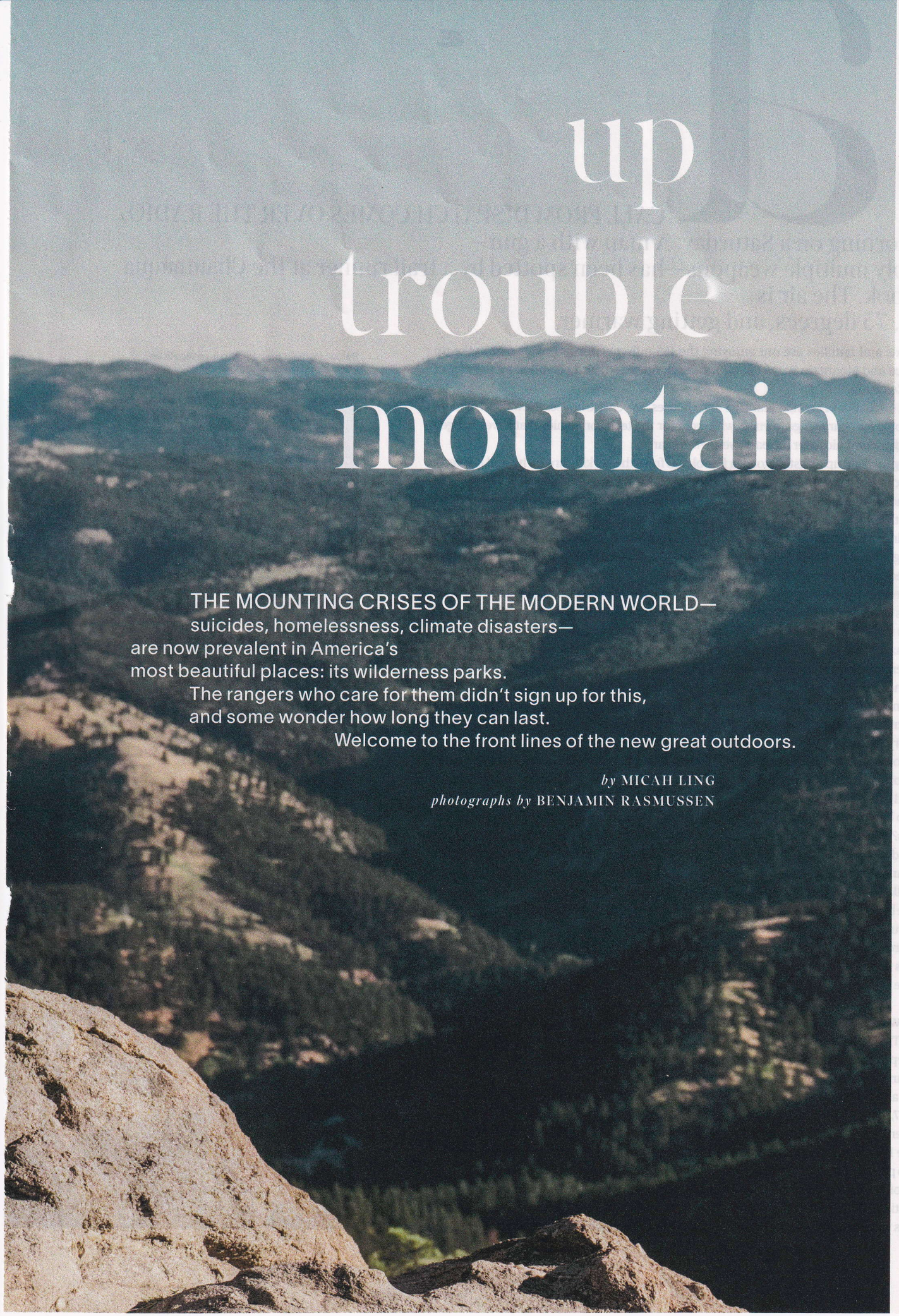
FOR STORE INFORMATION SEE PAGE 124. CASTING: ALICIA BRIDGEWATER FOR CASTING BY A. GROOMING: SANDRINE VAN SLEE FOR ART DEPARTMENT USING DIOR.

RANGER

up trouble mountain

THE MOUNTING CRISES OF THE MODERN WORLD—
suicides, homelessness, climate disasters—
are now prevalent in America's
most beautiful places: its wilderness parks.
The rangers who care for them didn't sign up for this,
and some wonder how long they can last.
Welcome to the front lines of the new great outdoors.

by MICAH LING
photographs by BENJAMIN RASMUSSEN



Boulder, Colorado, OSMP ranger Rick Hatfield looks out over Lost Gulch, an area where he said he could remember just off the top of his head three suicides taking place.

A CALL FROM DISPATCH COMES OVER THE RADIO, late morning on a Saturday: A man with a gun—possibly multiple weapons—has been spotted by a trail runner at the Chautauqua Overlook. The air is warm, 75 degrees, and getting warmer.

College kids and families are out enjoying the 155-mile network of trails that make up Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP), owned, operated, and patrolled by the city of Boulder, Colorado.

The trail originates in a residential area—nice houses. Expensive houses. New construction, the occasional four-car garage, owners who work for the tech companies that have changed Boulder's demographics over the past twenty-five years.

Two rangers head up Flagstaff Road, a few blocks from the parking area. The trail is steep—Boulder locals like it because they can get a good workout in just a few miles.

When the rangers finally see the suspect, off the trail and sitting on a rock that drops off to a steep cliff, they realize it's a kid. A teenager who looks just a little older than some of their own kids, wearing a rifle across his chest. A military-grade canvas bag droops by his side.

One ranger takes a deep breath and talks to the kid like a father would. Calmly. Asks the kid how he's feeling. Where he lives. What's in the bag.

Others respond. More rangers. The Boulder police. There are two dispatch centers that Boulder rangers are tied into with their radios, the city and the county of Boulder. So they hear any call that comes in about an incident on OSMP property and interact with the responding personnel. They also have a ranger on call who gets paged after hours to respond to emergencies in the park. Local law enforcement receives the same calls, but when a crime or a suspect is on OSMP land, rangers tend to be able to get there the fastest—they know the trails and the entire area so well.

The team talks the kid into hiking down the trail. Someone picks up the bag, full of several other guns, ammunition, plans for something violent. There's weight to it. More weight than a kid should carry. More than anyone should carry. But someone has to get it down the mountain.

Law enforcement is doing its best to clear the area, but like most trails in Boulder on the weekends, this one is packed. Other rangers and officers help out, walking right next to him, in front of him, and behind him. They've confiscated everything the kid had on him and with him. They try to keep him calm. Someone asks questions as they walk. *Where do you go to school? Do you play sports?* At one point, a ranger has a hand on the boy's shoulder—it's so small.

This kind of thing used to happen maybe once a year, maybe twice. Now it's sometimes once a month, and some of the rangers on the team aren't sure how much more they can handle.

They follow protocol. Keep it together. This is bad—something happened to this kid. It also could have been worse, and still could be. The rangers need to make sure nothing violent occurs. The kid could lunge for the bag or try to run away. No way of knowing.

Minds are racing fast now. One step ahead. Three steps ahead. They have to solve this problem, at this moment.

They are *in it*.

DOWNTOWN BOULDER SITS BELOW a series of foothills and rock formations known as the Flatirons. Trails tangle around the city limits. A fifteen-minute jaunt up the hill and you feel like you're deep in the wilderness. An hour out of the city and you can be in a subalpine forest above ten thousand feet. Up where the weather is different.

In 1996, about three million people visited OSMP. By 2005, that number had risen to 4.7 million. And in 2017, it was 6.4 million. During the pandemic, numbers climbed beyond anything the rangers had seen before. With more and more people coming to Colorado's Front Range—mountains within the Rockies that cut through central Colorado—parks and open spaces are becoming tougher to patrol. "This is our primary challenge," says Rick Hatfield, an OSMP ranger. "How do we keep doing what we do as well as we can in the face of unprecedented population growth and park visitation?" Whereas people used to escape to nature to relax and exercise, many now carry their crises with them. More drugs, more homelessness, more mental illness, more suicides.

Below: Hatfield preparing to investigate an abandoned homeless encampment (bottom), which included discarded needles from IV drug use.

More of what some rangers call "trail rage."

Not to get apocalyptic about it, but when a society fills up with so many problems that they spill over into what was supposed to be the last refuge, you start to wonder where else a person can hide.

Hatfield, twenty-three years on the job and the leader of a team of seven rangers, wasn't on duty the day they found that kid with the rifle, but his team was, and he debriefed them. They sat in a circle in the sun outside their office in Boulder. Hatfield helped his team process the events. As they laid it out, he thought about the specifics of the trail and what it's like to get to the lookout. Whenever he's out on a call that challenges him, Hatfield's own mind jumps to comfort: the words to his sons' favorite songs; his dog, Maggie; how good the beer tastes at Mountain Sun; something his wife said that morning. He knows what it's like to be out there staring into the abyss.

Hatfield looks like the kid in Boy Scouts who took it all very, very seriously. Except now he's fifty-two. Fit but not athletic, he makes good use of cargo pants. When he hears the story about his team on the familiar hard-packed dirt trail, fully exposed to the sun, all he can do is nod. It's weirdly usual these days. But in the circle, they look like they're at summer camp. Rangers always wear hiking boots and are always ready to get out on the trails. They also carry a radio, a gun, and handcuffs. There are nineteen full-time rangers in Boulder's OSMP division and four seasonal rangers with nine-month terms. Hatfield's team is close–they've been through a lot together.

Law-enforcement training for park rangers has evolved over the past twenty years, to keep pace with the escalation of bad shit going on in these woods. Over time, the city increased its mental self-help resources for first responders, including rangers. "Critical incident training" has become prevalent, to teach rangers to defuse and redirect a person's anxiety or anger–how to get someone out of a crisis while they are deep in it.

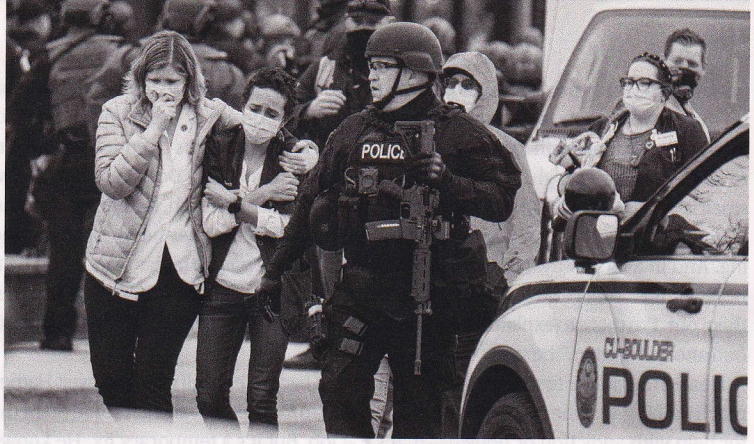
Still, all of this has raised anxiety levels among the rangers themselves. Every day, it feels possible that the really big, awful thing could happen, the thing that might make it unbearable for some to come back to work tomorrow.

When stressful things do happen–the kid on the trail with the gun, the suicide calls, suspects hiding from cops, assaults–the world, for these rangers, becomes very, very small. Nothing else exists. "Time slows down in a way that's almost impossible to explain," Hatfield says. "You become hyperaware of the danger to yourself and to other people, especially when you're alone in a remote location–and for rangers, you're often alone. Your eyes open up, your ears open up, and you have to fight allowing your senses to take over. You have to do the mechanical things. You have to get on the radio and get help and continue with a checklist of procedures even when your brain is telling you, Get out of there."

And when it's over? You have to forget. Push it out. If you can't, "you cannot live your life."

One morning on an off day, sitting in his kitchen, Hatfield smiles a little as he talks about how the job has changed: "It used to be, today I'm going to talk to a group of second graders about bears, and then I'm going on a good hike, and I'm going to check on bird nests."

Burton Stoner, fifty-five, has been the Ranger Services supervisor for the past four years. He says that these days, having frequent check-ins with the rangers is crucial. OSMP recently implemented regular mental-health training for them. In the past, they would have high-stress debriefings–for instance, if they had recovered a body or had been involved with an extreme rescue, they'd talk as a group–but now those meetings and conversations are a regular part of the job. "I like to check in, just ask, 'Where are you on the scale?' to get a feel for where people are in terms of their effectiveness and emotional ability to manage," Stoner says.



SNAPSHOTS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

THE NUMBERS OF REPORTED INCIDENTS IN BOULDER'S OSMP AREAS FROM 2001 AND 2020 SHOW A STARK SHIFT. ABOVE: THE AFTERMATH OF A GROCERY-STORE SHOOTING IN BOULDER IN MARCH; THE RANGERS WERE AMONG THE FIRST TO RESPOND TO THE SCENE.

2001	2020
26 medicals (injured visitors requiring a multi-agency response/potential evacuation)	100 medicals
3 fatalities (could include accidental death due to fall, heart attack, car accident; not including suicide)	6 fatalities
1 suicidal party (person who either committed suicide or was located alive)	16 suicidal parties

Another big change: It's far more accepted to give honest answers now. Whereas a decade ago, the answer would always be "I'm fine," "you don't get to say that anymore," Stoner says. Today, rangers are more forthcoming, and everyone understands when someone isn't okay. Stoner sends them to clear their head. "I tell them to go patrol on a trail that's farther away, less visited," he says. "Get out on their favorite terrain or favorite spot in a park."

He holds regular shift meetings, relies on Hatfield to arrange briefings, and tries to be in constant communication with the team: "We're taking the time to take care of each other in the right ways."

BOULDER PARENTS SHUTTLE their children to school and then run errands on e-bikes. Pearl Street is lined with cafés, gear shops, and brew pubs. During the wintertime, the parks department grooms one of the parks for cross-country skiing. It's a college town, a tech town, and an endurance-athlete training ground. But like all places, it's got its problems. Boulder County's housing issues (lack of affordability) and population growth (more than 10 percent from 2010 to 2019) are putting stress just about everywhere.

Hatfield and his wife, Amanda, and their sons, Finn, twelve, and Jack, nine, live in a small community in Boulder County where every house has kids and every back door is always open. Their garage is filled with bikes and sleds and camping equipment. Amanda used to be a ranger, too, for the county, where rangers don't carry guns and work alongside police departments. But city rangers, like Hatfield, take on law-enforcement duties themselves. They carry. And although he and Amanda had virtually identical training, over the past two decades, Hatfield's role has become increasingly dangerous and stressful.

On March 22 of this year, ten people were fatally shot in a Boulder supermarket, including an eleven-year veteran police officer. Park rangers were among the first responders on the scene.

The same week the kid with the rifle was out at Chautauqua Overlook, or maybe it's a different week–everything runs together–Hatfield is patrolling an area known for illegal camping. [*Editor's note: The names of locations and some identifying details have been changed.*] The encampment sits on the banks of Boulder Creek, which flows past the art museum and the manicured

TOP RIGHT: CHET STRANGE/GETTY IMAGES

park where young professionals eat overpriced tacos on their lunch break. Just a mile or two up the canyon, a group of homeless people gather. A dozen of them, more, are living in battered tents or makeshift tarp lean-tos. A thin, scruffy man in his twenties balances rocks end to end, four stones high. A woman lies topless in a hammock. Dogs splash in the water. The smell is intense—the skunky odor of marijuana, the stench of meth, human waste, spoiled food.

Rangers know not to be headstrong in a situation like this. They need to convey understanding. And in a lot of ways, Hatfield does understand. He had a similar start when he arrived in Boulder after college—there were just a lot more places to be back then. "I'm not there to kick them out. I'm there to explain that what they're doing is dangerous, and why I want to help them find another option," he says.

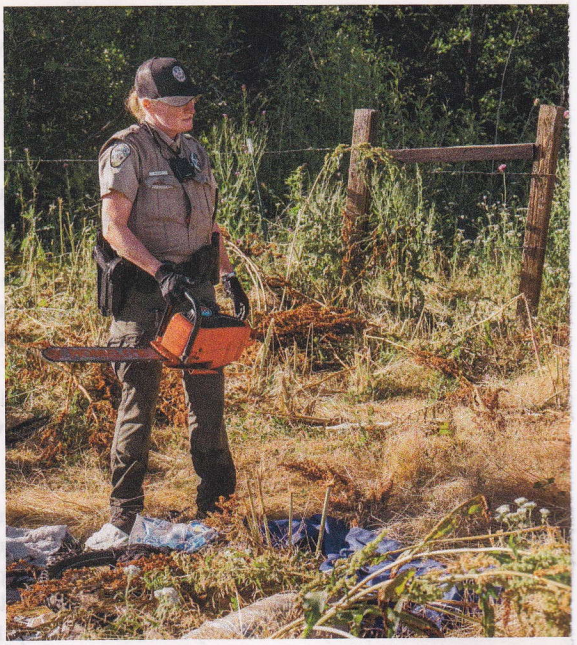
He asks them their first names and repeats them back to himself over and over. Hatfield doesn't reach for his gun. If he can get the place cleaned up for the day—and get some of them to a clinic for help with addiction or housing—that's the job. But it's a temporary fix. He knows he'll see most of them again. He hopes he can remember their names. Make them feel seen—and heard.

IN MID-OCTOBER, TWO FIRES IGNITE less than twenty-four hours apart in the mountain towns of Boulder County. The winds are intense, and both fires grow rapidly, to more than nine thousand acres overnight. Boulder receives less than an inch of rain the month of these fires. Any precipitation vanishes in minutes. In dry grass or sage, with a decent wind, you can drive a truck at fifteen miles per hour next to a burning field and the fire will race you—and win. Hatfield is inhaling two packs of forest an hour. It fills the lungs in such a way that all you can think is: *I never want to sit around a campfire again.*

He and nine other rangers are working on fire lines designed to stop the movement of the blaze. All fuels are removed, blade of grass by pine needle by twig by branch. The ground has to be scraped to the soil in a strip three feet wide, wide enough to stop embers that might roll across the line. This is protocol. It is also an act of hope.

Smoke blocks out the sun and burns the eyes. Incinerated trees and animals fall in flakes of ash, like snow. It's been raining ash for so many days that you just accept it as part of yourself. You are ash. With so much smoke, and darkened stumps in every direction, it's hard to have any hope at all.

A week after the second wildfire ignited, an actual early-season snowstorm arrives. Hatfield's been working fifteen-hour days, sometimes starting at 5:00 A.M. His body is caked with the kind of grit that sticks even after a week of hot showers. He and Amanda stand in their kitchen on a Sunday morning watching the snow fall in clumps. "We couldn't be getting better weather," Hatfield says with his hands around a huge mug of coffee.



SOMETIMES HATFIELD smells fire even though nothing is burning. He hears a loud noise, wonders if it's a kid with a rifle.

He worked the entire week on fire mitigation and can barely keep his eyes open. The boys and their friends roughhouse upstairs and slide through on socked feet to grab a slice of last night's pizza. Working wildfire is something Hatfield has done from early on, but it's never been like this. "If you had told me that it was possible for a fire to jump the Continental Divide in October and then travel downhill at such speed, even a year ago I would have told you that's impossible," he says. "And everyone I've talked to who knows how fire moves has said, 'Totally impossible.'"

AS A STUDENT AT OHIO NORTHERN UNIVERSITY in the early nineties, Hatfield built a branch fort out in the woods west of campus, and he sometimes slept there instead of in his dorm. A couple years after graduation, he headed to Colorado to rock climb. He lived out of his truck for a while, then in a mountain cabin that had no plumbing or electricity. Sometimes Hatfield hikes there to remember how this all started. To remember who he was.

Back then, he'd sometimes run into a park ranger doing an annual bird count. Because he spent so much time exploring the rock, Hatfield could tell the rangers where he knew there were nests. He let them in on his secrets. In the spring of 1994, he started volunteering. Four years later, they offered him a job.

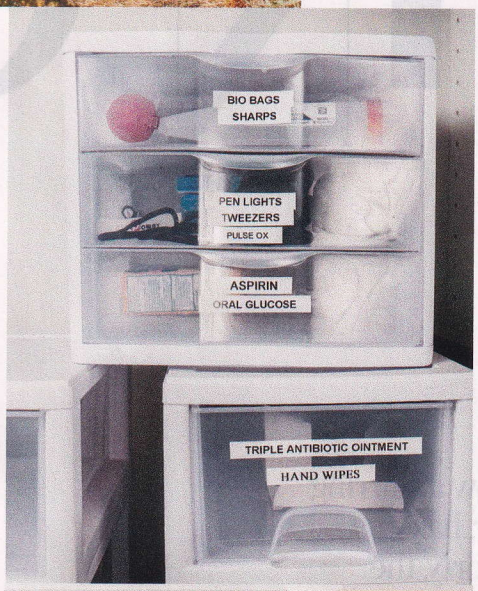
He was told to survey the land, look for bolts that climbers had placed on the rock. (Historically, in rock climbing, permanent bolts have been drilled into cliff faces as a way to secure ropes, but they're frowned upon in many parks because they can damage the stone and become unsafe for climbers.) Hatfield's boss used to joke that he never wanted to see him because he should always be out on the trails looking at the rock. Hatfield saw an opportunity to work with climbers and not just go behind their backs determining when they were breaking the rules. He forged relationships. They worked together, keeping things natural, searching for nesting raptors.

Hatfield couldn't believe he was getting paid to do this. Outdoors all day, every day, talking to climbers, looking for those raptors and noting their welfare, hiking incredible trails. He rarely encountered danger and felt almost no stress at all.

MARIA MAYER, FIFTY-TWO, a ranger naturalist for the city of Boulder and Hatfield's first boss and mentor, started as an intern in 1991. She left Colorado to work in Vermont in 2001, and when she returned to Boulder in 2018, she saw stark changes, to both the city and the job. "Not only were there local changes, there were huge nationwide changes," she says. "The mental-health crisis, the opioid and methamphetamine crisis, homelessness, the changes in civility—acceptable ways to interact and communicate with fellow humans—and the erosion of trust between law enforcement and the public, which is now at total crisis level."

When Mayer started out, she studied flora and investigated plant biology in the area. Another project was keeping tabs on invasive plants. "One of the neat things about this job was how much learning was involved—all of a sudden it would be your turn to work on a project and so you'd learn all about that topic."

Today, she faces the same challenges the rest of the rangers do. Even car thefts at the trailheads have increased. Rangers have busted whole crews of robbers who set up sophisticated lookout systems. They destroy security cameras or evade their lenses. Rangers are now trained in how to approach someone who's wielding a crowbar in a parking lot—you have to remember they could be a decoy, a distraction, so you look in all directions.



Left: Hatfield and fellow OSMP ranger Maria Mayer examining detritus near a homeless camp. Below: Boxes hold an array of supplies a ranger needs on the job now; a bulletin board memorializes two recently killed police officers.

You stare into the abyss and you wonder: Can the center hold?

The bad guys often head to the mountains to escape the advantages that law enforcement has in urban settings, like traffic cameras and a higher density of officers. "There are so many situations now when I have to draw my gun," Hatfield says. "A lot of times we're working with another agency, like the sheriff's department. They'll put out a call: 'BOLO [be on the lookout] for a black SUV, broken headlight, this plate number. Involved in a kidnapping.' We'll pull into the Walker Ranch trailhead and there's the car—we're nose to nose with the vehicle or the party that we're looking for, and our closest resource is fifteen or twenty minutes away." It might not sound like a lot of time, but so much can happen in a matter of minutes.

More moments:

A call from dispatch before sunrise—a trail runner reported a man jumping from a magnificent rock formation a few miles from town. The path to the arch meanders through a grassy meadow and a pine forest, then up a long flagstone staircase, gaining one thousand feet in a few miles. An incredible place to watch the sunrise.

Another call, late afternoon—an area that's out of town a bit. A popular, dog-friendly trail. A crystal-clear creek with a waterfall. A report of a car running, windows filling with exhaust. A body reportedly slumped over the steering wheel.

The times when the call comes too late: "It's so difficult to do a body recovery. Rangers, we usually started this work imagining the kinds of rescues we'd be doing of someone who broke a leg hiking their favorite trail," Hatfield says. "But body rescue is so lasting. You're feeling empathy and vicarious trauma."

Can the center hold?

THERE ARE GOOD DAYS. On occasion, Hatfield still gets to talk to volunteers about cliff-nesting raptors and how the climbing community can help keep an eye on the birds. Those days are like being on vacation. "It's weird—my team and I have gotten so good at the intense situations that sometimes, even when it's traumatic, you have this feeling of accomplishment. Like, no one else could have done what we just did, and maybe it'll haunt us, but we did it." Hatfield is proud of the way his team has adapted and how well they've learned to take on constantly evolving situations.

Still, Hatfield sometimes smells a wildfire when nothing is burning. He hears loud noises that make him wonder if a kid on a hill is doing something violent. He sees flashes of horrible scenes. Senses get confused—or rather, tell the truth. "On the calendar, these moments last an hour or so, but in your head you're building something that you're just never going to forget. They get bigger and bigger and bigger in your head," he says.

On a Sunday in late fall, Hatfield is far from the trails he knows so well, the dirt and the rocks and the trees that used to bring him peace. He's rounding his second loop on a stand-up paddleboard at Pinewood Reservoir, outside Boulder. It's a small recreation area with campsites, hiking trails, and lake access. No motorboats.

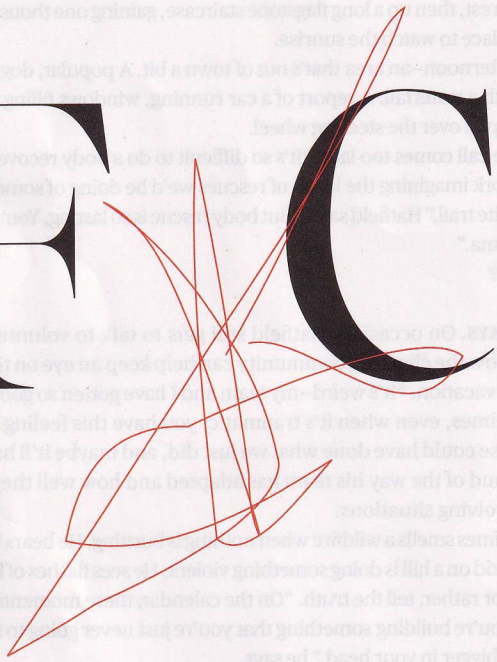
Hatfield just upgraded his board—there was a special for first responders. "This one is much easier to maneuver," he says. All four Hatfields and Maggie the dog come up to Pinewood most Sundays. They paddle the lake, they make dinner over a fire, sometimes they camp. Finn questions everything. Jack is bubbly and sensitive, easy to make laugh. Tonight, despite having SUPs and kayaks of their own, the boys are more interested in the mud. It's good mud. They're smearing it all over their bodies and tossing handfuls back and forth, giggling.

After hours of letting the breeze do its thing on the lake, Hatfield piles the kayaks and SUPs into the back of his new Tacoma while his sons do their best to clean the mud off in the lake. This—this is what he loves. This sky, this water. "All I want to do now is watch falcons," Hatfield says. "I don't want to go to work. I don't want to supervise people anymore. I just want to watch falcons in the Flatirons." It's not that he or the other rangers don't want to help people who are in trouble. But when there are too many people to help and too many terrible calls to answer, you start to question whether you're really helping anyone at all. And during all those moments when you're scared shitless that this might be the time—Will the kid lunge for his gun? Is she gonna jump? Are they armed?—you start to wonder whether you could use some help, too.

Amanda starts a fire so they can cook kebabs. When they realize no one packed utensils, Finn whittles makeshift chopsticks with an ax. Hatfield will soon have the opportunity to retire early, if he chooses. He's not down and out every day. He's not physically injured beyond function. But it ain't great. And when he looks at his boys and thinks about the things he wants to be able to do with them in the coming years, early retirement from what was once a dream job feels disturbingly rational.

Sometimes it feels as if leaving the wilderness he has grown to fear might be the only way back to the wilderness he loves so much.

NOT F*CKING AROUND



With a Tony, a Grammy, two Oscar nods, and now a starring role in *The Many Saints of Newark*, Leslie Odom Jr. has exploded into the Hollywood stratosphere. At forty, the emerging leading man got here—finally—by saying no.
By Alex Bhattacharji *Photographs by* Tyrell Hampton *Styling by* Avo Yermagyan

Jacket ($5,700), shirt ($1,400), trousers ($980), and shoes ($850) by **Gucci;** forged carbon ring ($3,200) by **David Yurman.**

This page: Sweater ($3,300) and trousers ($1,750) by **Dior Men;** shirt ($385) by **Ami Paris.** Opposite: Jacket ($750) and trousers ($650) by **Bode;** tank ($43, pack of three) by **Calvin Klein Underwear;** sneakers ($750) by **John Lobb;** sunglasses ($620) by **Jacques Marie Mage;** socks ($29) by **Pantherella.**

AS HE OPENS THE DOOR TO HIS BABY-BLUE BMW CONVERTIBLE, Leslie Odom Jr. announces our itinerary for this sweltering June morning. First, coffee. Next: deliver breakfast pastries to his parents, then to Lucy, his four-year-old daughter, and his mother- and father-in-law. These relatives, Odom explains as we climb into the car, all live within a five-block radius of the home he and his wife, Nicolette Robinson, share with Lucy and their five-month-old son. Yes, Odom is an eager family man—one of several traits you might consider . . . corny. There's also song-and-dance man (thanks, in large part, to his Tony-winning role in *Hamilton*), self-help author (book title: *Failing Up: How to Take Risks, Aim Higher, and Never Stop Learning*), and jazz vocalist (he has released not one but two albums of holiday music). When Odom starts the car, the coupe's engine is quickly drowned out by Nat King Cole's rendition of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" piping through the stereo. "My phone's on shuffle, man," he protests. But when the next tune is a Hanukkah song sung in Hebrew—Robinson's mother is Jewish, and the couple observe the holiday each year—he just laughs and shakes his head. "I know, I know."

Here's the thing about Odom: He does know.

Cool or cringe, Odom owns his every move. "As a performer, he doesn't lie," his *Hamilton* costar Daveed Diggs says. That extends to his personal life. Regina King, who directed Odom in *One Night in Miami. . .*, says, "He is the same person on and off the set." Odom makes no effort to disguise where he falls in the star system's pecking order. "I'm still not a 'first call' guy," he says. "I don't give a fuck. I'll take Michael B. Jordan's leftovers or Corey Hawkins's leftovers or David Oyelowo's leftovers any day. Those guys have done more, so they are 'first call.' When they get busy? They can't do all the movies. . . ."

Odom isn't shy about admitting he wasn't the first guy called to play Sam Cooke in *One Night in Miami. . .*, a role that earned him Oscar and Golden Globe nods for best supporting actor and best original song for "Speak Now," which he cowrote and sang. Odom also wasn't the first call for the *Sopranos* prequel, *The Many Saints of Newark* (in theaters October 1). When the phone rang, he seized the chance, showcasing a badass side as an inner-city gangster.

Opportunistic as he is, Odom is striving to be more discriminating. "*Hamilton* was the thing that said, 'Now you get to . . .' When you have that kind of success—realized because I'd seen other people have it—you get a chip. Now, you've gotta play the chip wisely, but you don't get anything for keeping it, right?"

There's also a sense of urgency to Odom. He will star in the upcoming *Exorcist* reboot. In a few days, he's leaving to film *Knives Out 2* in Greece and Serbia. Odom's first trip since the start of quarantine is shaping up to be a chrysalis. While he's away, he will move into a new, larger house and, upon turning forty, enter a new decade—and, he hopes, a more capacious new career phase. Six years after becoming "*Hamilton* star Leslie Odom Jr.," he is on the cusp of the type of stardom that transcends a show title: Having made the leap from stage to screen, he is ascending to leading-man status.

It's heady stuff. "I just feel like it's time to have some new goals," he says. "I start therapy next week. First time. We'll see how it goes." One goal is to make space for the kind of growth he yearns for. As for what that is, Odom

says: "Get to know and name the things I want to do so that I can line up my actions behind those things. If you're not careful, you end up living someone else's version of what they think you should do."

Odom has heard hard truths about himself before. When he was in his mid-twenties, his friend and coach Ron Coleman told him his manner was wrong. Odom had modeled his demeanor after those of smooth Black crooners from the mid-twentieth century, like Sammy Davis Jr. and Nat King Cole. Coleman said he had to stop being "too cool for school," Odom says. Their never-let-them-see-you-sweat mien had meaning; his did not. "To not sweat was a radical protest, right? The confidence that they had to find in a world that despised them," Coleman told Odom. "You not sweating looks different–shallow. So fucking show us something. Work harder." As soon as Odom heard the criticism, it clicked: "Light switch! He's fucking right."

According to Odom's mentor and former teacher Billy Porter, "Leslie, he'll give you bread crumbs–he'll crumb you, and he'll crumb you. Sometimes the moment requires something full-out. That is uncomfortable for him, for whatever reason." Porter observed this as Odom's professor at Carnegie Mellon and again when *Hamilton* was off-Broadway. During several sequences, Odom didn't want to dance, thinking it was something leading men didn't do. "He was holding back. He's not anymore," Porter says. "That's why he's where he is, a two-time Oscar-nominated star."

With help from friends and collaborators, Odom is starting to get comfortable with who he is and what lies within him. Most of all, he's enjoying the release. "When somebody shows you new depths, new heights," he says, whipping himself up. "When somebody shows you there's more inside of you. . ."–Odom clenches and shakes his head–"Fuck yeah!"

IN 1998, AT THE AGE OF SEVENTEEN, ODOM WAS CAST IN *RENT* and left high school in Philadelphia a year early for Broadway. When the Great White Way came calling again a year later, he reluctantly passed, opting instead to go to college. Irate at Odom's decision, the show's casting director excoriated him, saying, " 'How dare you? You don't walk away. I'll see you in five years when you're waiting tables.' "

The incident taught Odom a lasting lesson: "Own your yeses and nos–it's all you have," he says. "I could say no and say yes to myself in some private way. That gave me a tremendous amount of confidence."

Once he graduated from Carnegie Mellon, where he studied drama, he moved to Los Angeles. Within forty-eight hours of arriving in Hollywood, Odom had booked a part on *CSI: Miami*. At the time, he dreamed of landing on a network sitcom, ideally with a catchphrase as his calling card. He began hopscotching between parts on TV–*The Big House, Gilmore Girls, Grey's Anatomy, Supernatural, NCIS: Los Angeles*–and the film *Red Tails,* about the Tuskegee Airmen. Sitcom stardom eluded him, however, at first to his chagrin and later to his relief. Odom saw serious, Shakespearean actors he knew land those coveted comedic parts only to become punchlines. "Now people yell a silly catchphrase at them," he says. "They're reduced to one line."

And yet, after nearly a decade of striving as an actor, Odom found himself reduced to one word, a single, trenchant term: *token*. He had moved to New York after scoring a role on *Smash,* the NBC musical drama about the making of a Broadway show. The short-lived series is perhaps memorable for popularizing the concept of hate-watching. In a series of snarky episode recaps, a *New York* magazine writer distilled Odom's character, the ensemble dancer Sam Strickland, to its essence: Token. As in, "He runs through the theater, past . . . Tom getting a Magical Negro pep talk from Token."

"It was fucking awful," he says. "The most painful part was that I could see where she was coming from. That is, how they were treating that character. And so she called it out. It was hurtful, but it pushed me to the next place."

That next place was a small black-box theater at Vassar College, in Poughkeepsie, New York, where the creator of *In the Heights* was workshopping something so batshit it just might be brilliant: a hip-hop musical about the founding fathers, all played by BIPOC performers. Sitting in the last folding chair of the last row, Odom saw *Hamilton* as a Bat-Signal–even brighter, bolder, and more literate than *Rent*.

Three months later, Lin-Manuel Miranda emailed, asking Odom if he'd like to play Aaron Burr, sir, in a table read. Odom overprepared, learning all of Burr's lines and songs. When Diggs, who played the Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson, heard Odom sing as Burr for the first time, he nearly quit. "I was like, 'That's something I had never experienced before,' " says Diggs. " 'That guy's voice is not real. His instrument is so finely tuned.' I remember being like, 'Oh, I probably shouldn't be here. That's not right.' "

While prepping for *Hamilton*'s off-Broadway run at New York's Public Theater, Odom learned that NBC had bought a pilot he'd shot, *State of Affairs*. Presented with the stability, visibility, and compensation ($500,000) he craved, he chose uncertainty, obscurity, and wages of $400 a week. The choice–saying no–was another way of saying yes to himself: Although the TV part was substantive–a far cry from Token–Burr and *Hamilton* were once in a generation. He convinced the head of NBC to let him break his contract.

Amid Odom's sold-out *Hamilton* run of more than five hundred shows, the honors piled up. He performed with the cast at the White House for the Obamas. At the 2016 Tony Awards–a near sweep for *Hamilton*–Odom beat out Miranda for best performance by a leading actor in a musical.

"He's very focused," Diggs says of his castmate, "but he was never the loudest one in the room–until it came time to have your back. Leslie will stand up and become the loudest person. He's not afraid."

Behind the scenes, Odom battled producers for a fair salary, pushing them for pay equity after a white performer from another show let slip what he made. "No Black person I knew was making what this motherfucker was making," he says. "I was like, 'Oh, that's what you're getting to be the tenth guy playing that role?' I'm the first guy to play this role. So you know what I did? I asked for the same exact salary, not a penny more."

Near the end of Odom's stint, *Hamilton*'s producers announced plans to film a live performance featuring the original cast. However, no one had contacted Odom's agent. Offered what he considered a pittance, he refused. He called out for a day to send a message: "I know I'm not going to stop you guys from shooting this movie, but I don't have to be here." (It eventually aired on Disney+ over July Fourth weekend in 2020, earning Odom an Emmy nomination.)

The negotiations ultimately helped bring the entire company of original performers, including the ensemble members, profit sharing. "At the end of the day, if you're not willing to walk away, you're dead in the water," he says. In an industry that operates on the notion that everything is negotiable, some matters of principle are nonnegotiable. "It has to be more than ego. It has to go deeper," Odom says. "It has to be about right and wrong, because that you can stand on." A moment passes, and he nods. "For real. I'm not fucking around."

> "AT THE END of the day, if you're not willing to walk away, you're dead in the water," Odom says. *"It has to* BE MORE *than ego."*

"WELL, YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT COMING OUT," ODOM says to his mother, Yvette, on the phone as we drive. "I can just hand the pastries to you through your screen." She had been in bed when he called. Ten minutes later, she and Odom's father are both sitting at a table on their patio, Yvette in tie-dye and Leslie Sr. wearing a Michael Jackson tee.

Although the Odoms appreciate the croissant and scones, the delivery they want is a family history lesson. The day before, Odom recorded *Finding Your Roots with Henry Louis Gates Jr.,* and he has yet to finish telling his parents all that the PBS show uncovered.

Leslie Sr. leans in when Odom reveals he has one white ancestor who

Turtleneck ($5,800) and trousers ($1,300) by **Gucci.**

"OWN *your* YESES and *NOS*—it's all YOU have. I could say *no* and say YES to *myself* in some private WAY. That *gave* me a tremendous AMOUNT *of* confidence."

fought against the British in the Revolutionary War. He shakes his head when Odom tells him another fought for the Confederacy.

When Yvette hears that one branch of her family emigrated from South Africa to Barbados and was never enslaved, she gets choked up. "If I knew, I would have stood more proudly," she says. "My whole life, people always said to me, 'You're different.' And I grew up being angry, ashamed."

Odom recounts the story of another of his mother's forebears, a woman from Barbados named Clementina, who was the child of a slaveholder and a slave. In his will, Clementina's white father left her a large sum of money, $13,000. Gates and the producers expected that revelation would bring forth a flood of emotion. "I could tell they were waiting for something," Odom says. "And I was like, 'Look, we can keep moving. It's not happening.' "

The on-camera catharsis came when he saw the will of a plantation owner with ledger listings for his great-great-great-grandparents on his father's side. It did not show their names, merely their cash value—$960 for the mother and child and $700 for the father. "That was when I got emotional," Odom says. "It really moved me to see a number assigned to a person in my family. I cried."

As Leslie Sr. nods solemnly, Yvette shakes her head and asks, "Why was the male worth less than the woman? Because she was built for children?"

"Well, she came with a child," Odom explains. "It was $960 for both. A two-for-one."

Among the many tragic legacies of slavery is the belief that *a* people, not people, were enslaved. The inhumanity of the ledger reminded Odom that "each one of them is an individual life," he says. "Wrap your mind around that. Now here's another one, and here's a child, and here's a woman. It connected me to it with a specificity that I'd never had before."

After each taping, *Finding Your Roots* provides guests with birth certificates, death certificates, census records, letters, marriage licenses—all the documents Gates and his team unearthed. "Once they send me the Book of Life," Odom tells his parents as he prepares to leave, "I'll give it to you guys."

WHEN ODOM GOT THE CALL TO PLAY SAM COOKE IN *ONE NIGHT in Miami*..., he turned it down. Playing Cooke terrified him; the singer was beloved in the Black community. *If I fuck up, I'm done,* Odom thought. Then he did his research. "The public face? Bro never sweated," he says. "But behind closed doors? A real hard motherfucker."

Odom plays it just as hard in *The Many Saints of Newark,* in which his character, a gangster named Harold, goes toe-to-toe with the Italian mob. "He was just so consistent," says David Chase, who cowrote and produced the film and created *The Sopranos.* "It sounds bland, but it's incredibly hard. His performance was right where he needed to be all the time."

The events occur in the shadow of the Newark Rebellion, more commonly known as the Newark riots of 1967, which began in response to police brutality and racism. Although the film was shot before protests swept the country following the murder of George Floyd, the depiction of the demonstrations and violence feels timely. "People are going to understand that now more than they would have had the movie come out before last year," Odom says.

"He brought a class that I wasn't expecting," Chase says of Odom. "Harold was a classy guy under Leslie's interpretation. Tough but classy." One thing that stood out to Chase was the walk Odom created for Harold, where he dragged his feet, almost like a tap dancer might. "It's just getting in touch with—Alvin Ailey called them the Blood Memories," Odom says of his inspiration for Harold, "everything I know about Black life and what we've made of ourselves here and for ourselves."

Outwardly, Odom's swagger evokes a younger Denzel Washington or a Paul Newman. "What comes through is intelligence, sexiness, sense of humor," says Chase. "All I can say is I have no doubt that he's going to be a movie star. When you watch him, that's what you're seeing: a star."

Internally, playing the heavy clicked for him. "There was something about it that was simplifying me, inspiring me, grounding me," Odom says as he takes me to his new house, a sprawling Spanish mission-style home that's a half block from his old one. "I just kept following that feeling. I recognize

This page: Coat ($3,290) by **Fendi Men's;** jacket ($963) and trousers ($693) by **Tokyo James;** turtleneck ($178) by **Boss;** shoes ($895) by **Giuseppe Zanotti.**
Opposite: Jacket ($4,900), shirt ($690), turtleneck ($890), trousers ($530), and shoes ($750) by **Salvatore Ferragamo.**

the person up there, not as me but like a relative. It's pretty cool when you can reveal a new side of yourself to yourself."

While he's driving there, a pint bottle of mouthwash falls out onto the floorboard. I look at him quizzically. "Sometimes," Odom says with a long shoulder shrug, "I smoke, secret-secret."

The truth is, Odom is not some squeaky-clean character in an after-school special. "I don't want people to feel like my projects are medicine," he says. "If there's a little more name recognition, then maybe I can get them to come see this little movie they wouldn't have otherwise cared about." Odom is following a trail blazed by his friend Michael B. Jordan, attaching himself as a producer to projects and creating a "tailor-made fiefdom" in Hollywood. He and Diggs are adapting the Percival Everett novel *Telephone,* with Odom set to star. But his ultimate goal, he tells me, is learning to let go.

"There are seasons," Odom says. "There's a time to be more austere. There's a time to be fucking rigid about the things that you take. And there's a time to be a little more flowing, you know what I mean?"

Odom steps out of the car and stretches in the midmorning sun. "I don't want to put senseless limitations or boundaries on myself," he says. "Let me go take a deep breath. Let me have some fun, too. Let me shake it out."

As he enters the gates, he raises his fists in the air, puffs out his chest, and lets out a muted primal scream. A moment later, he walks past the lawn strewn with toddler toys and disappears inside.

PRODUCTION: SERIE YOON/NIGHT WATER CREATIVE. HAIR: ANNITRIA WICKER. GROOMING: MIRNA JOSE/MUA.

BASED ON A TRUE STORY

(continued from page 83)

an expensive outfit he wore for the magazine photo shoot, which is wrapping up after a long afternoon.

Various assistants and production people rush around, breaking down equipment, packing up clothing. OWEN checks the time—he has a dinner to get to. He looks tired. He just flew in from Los Angeles last night, and from Maui to Los Angeles the night before that. At 7:00 A.M. tomorrow, he flies to France to help promote *The French Dispatch* at the Cannes Film Festival. He is mid-conversation with RYAN.

OWEN

When I was a little kid, I wanted to know what caused thunder—

An assistant pokes her head in the door.

ASSISTANT

Owen, your car is downstairs.

He's late. He suddenly rushes, putting on his belt with one hand, stepping on the heels of his shoes. RYAN rushes to hold the elevator. OWEN thanks the crew, and there is clapping.

Suddenly the hold button on the elevator has reached its limit, and the door starts closing, and it will not be stopped.

RYAN

Owen! Quick, it's closing.

[*Slow-motion*] OWEN turns and runs to the door, his blond mane fluttering behind him, belt hanging from his waist, face gripped with determination, teeth clenched, bound for glory. At the last second, he thrusts a hand through the narrow opening before the door closes, grabbing RYAN's forearm really freaking hard—and then, by force of nature, OWEN wills the door open and almost falls into the elevator car, barely steadying himself to avoid colliding with the rear wall.

As the elevator descends, he runs a hand through his hair, lets out a deep breath, and cracks up laughing. Then he stops, raises his eyebrows, and smiles.

OWEN

Well, there's our ending.

The door opens.

FADE OUT

SUBDUING MY EGO TO FLEX MY CAREER

(continued from page 42)

beef. I knew I couldn't go to Sing Sing's superintendent; let's just say he wasn't a fan of my reporting. But I didn't need him. By now I had a network of contacts and people in my corner. I called a colleague and told him what was happening. He in turn reached out to the spokesperson for New York's Department of Corrections, who knew me well from all the times publications had reached out for comment on my articles, and explained the situation. Soon after, security escorted me, against my wishes, to an involuntary protection unit.

The next day, I was brought to a sweltering interview room to talk to a man from the department's Office of Special Investigations. In order to help me get off B Block, he said, he needed names. I told him I wouldn't provide them. In that case, he said, I'd be involuntarily kept on a protection unit—which, having spent nine months on one after I got stabbed and wouldn't name my attacker, I can say is pretty horrible—because he couldn't protect me if he didn't know my enemies. If he did that, I said, I'd make a lot of noise.

I imagine that to most readers, what I said and did not say to the investigator comes across as following the prison code. I assure you that prisoners who read this will feel I broke it. This is the high-wire conundrum I walk every time my words appear in print.

If he couldn't get me back to A Block, the investigator asked, where else would I want to go? Two days later, I was bumping around the back of a corrections van with tinted windows, shackled and cuffed and chained, heading to Sullivan Correctional Facility, a small maximum-security prison in the southern Catskills. As people in cars and homes flashed by, I wondered about their lives, and whether they'd read any of my stories about our lives.

Sullivan, known for housing high-profile convicts and prisoners with special needs, has been my home for more than a year. I miss my friends on A Block, and sometimes I even miss Sing Sing. But I have no regrets.

When I told my mobster friend here that I was working on this piece, he couldn't understand why I would dredge up the story of how I wound up here. Wouldn't that create more complications, make my life harder? He said cracking Mr. Pink would have been the simpler solution. Maybe so. But just because I avoid confrontation in prison doesn't mean I avoid it on the page. I still have my edge, but I've learned to channel it into my work.

I was reminded of how I'd left off with the special investigator. Why, he'd asked, had I written that *Sports Illustrated* story in the first place?

"Because I took a fucking shot," I'd replied. "That's why!"

CREDITS

STORE INFORMATION

For the items featured in Esquire, please consult the website or call the phone number provided.

The Method, p. 47: The Brooklyn Circus **jacket,** 718-858-0919. **P. 50:** 18 East cargo **pants,** sahasika **jacket,** and double-knee **pants,** 646-866-4238. 18 East x Standard Issue **T-shirt,** 646-866-4238. 18 East **shirt jacket,** 18east.co. 18 East x Kanata **sweater,** 18east.co. 18 East x Padmore & Barnes **boots,** 18east.co. **P. 52:** Cartier **watch,** cartier.com. **P. 54:** Marine Serre **sweater vest, turtleneck,** and **hat,** marineserre.com.

It's Time to…Really Start Dressin', p. 62: Husbands **suit, shirt,** and **tie,** husbands-paris.com. Christian Louboutin **boots,** christianlouboutin.com. **P. 64:** Husbands **belt,** husbands-paris.com. Charvet **tie,** mrporter.com. Asprey **briefcase,** asprey.com. **P. 66:** Boss **jacket** and **trousers,** hugoboss.com. Gabriela Hearst **sweater,** gabrielahearst.com. Velva Sheen **T-shirt,** endclothing.com. Malone Souliers **boots,** malonesouliers.com. Tom Wood **necklace,** tomwoodproject.com. **P. 68:** Good Man Brand **sneakers,** thehouseoflrc.com. Boss **sunglasses,** hugoboss.com. Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello **bag,** ysl.com. **P. 70:** Alanui **cardigan,** farfetch.com. Stadium by Stadium Goods **sweatshirt** and **track pants,** stadiumgoods.com. Reebok **sneakers,** reebok.com. The Colours Shop **socks,** thecoloursshop.com. **P. 72:** Fendi Men's **bag,** fendi.com. Adidas Originals by Wales Bonner **sneakers,** adidas.com. Roxanne Assoulin **bracelets,** roxanneassoulin.com. Isabel Marant **hat,** saksfifthavenue.com.

On Deck, p. 97: Golden Goose **track pants,** leather 1OF1 **sneakers, shirt, trousers,** suede 1OF1 **sneakers, socks, hat,** and **bandanna,** goldengoose.com. **P. 98:** Golden Goose suede **jacket, sweatshirt, track pants,** black **T-shirt,** white **T-shirt, hat,** and leather 1OF1 **sneakers,** goldengoose.com. **P. 99:** Golden Goose **blazer, track jacket, trousers,** suede 1OF1 **sneakers, hat, sweater, T-shirt, bandanna, shorts,** leather 1OF1 **sneakers,** and **socks,** goldengoose.com.

Rebel Rebel…, p. 100: Canali **suit, shirt,** and **tie,** canali.com. Golden Goose **boots,** goldengoose.com. **P. 101:** Amiri **jacket, tank,** and **trousers,** amiri.com. Christian Louboutin **boots,** christianlouboutin.com. Fendi Men's **jacket, shirt,** and **trousers,** fendi.com. Tie Bar **tie,** thetiebar.com. Amiri **boots,** amiri.com. **P. 102:** Dolce & Gabbana **jacket, tank,** and **trousers,** dolcegabbana.com. Alexander McQueen **boots,** alexandermcqueen.com. Tudor **watch,** tudorwatch.com. **P. 103:** Ralph Lauren **coat, shirt, suit,** and **tie,** ralphlauren.com. **P. 104:** Prada **jacket, jumpsuit, shirt,** and **tie,** prada.com. Christian Louboutin **boots,** christianlouboutin.com. **P. 105:** Alexander McQueen **coat, shirt,** and **trousers,** alexandermcqueen.com. Dolce & Gabbana **tank** and **trousers,** dolcegabbana.com. **P. 106:** Thom Browne **suit, tie,** and **shirt,** thombrowne.com. Celine by Hedi Slimane **shoes,** celine.com. Falke **socks,** falke.com. **P. 107:** Rhude **jacket,** ssense.com. Salvatore Ferragamo **shirt** and **trousers,** ferragamo.com. Boss **tie,** hugoboss.com. Amiri **boots,** amiri.com. **P. 108:** Louis Vuitton Men's **jacket, shirt, tie, trousers,** and **watch,** louisvuitton.com. Manolo Blahnik **shoes,** manoloblahnik.com. Falke **socks,** falke.com. **P. 109:** Giorgio Armani **suit** and **tie,** armani.com. Eton **shirt,** etonshirts.com. Christian Louboutin **boots,** christianlouboutin.com. Jacques Marie Mage **sunglasses,** jacquesmariemage.com.

Not F*cking Around, p. 117: Gucci **jacket, shirt, trousers,** and **shoes,** gucci.com. David Yurman **ring,** davidyurman.com. **P. 118:** Dior Men **sweater** and **trousers,** dior.com. Ami Paris **shirt,** amiparis.com. **P. 119:** Bode **jacket** and **trousers,** bodenewyork.com. Calvin Klein Underwear **tank,** calvinklein.com. John Lobb **sneakers,** johnlobb.com. Jacques Marie Mage **sunglasses,** jacquesmariemage.com. Pantherella **socks,** pantherella.com. **P. 121:** Gucci **turtleneck** and **trousers,** gucci.com. **P. 122:** Salvatore Ferragamo **jacket, shirt, turtleneck, trousers,** and **shoes,** ferragamo.com. **P. 123:** Fendi Men's **coat,** fendi.com. Tokyo James **jacket** and **trousers,** farfetch.com. Boss **turtleneck,** hugoboss.com. Giuseppe Zanotti **shoes,** giuseppezanotti.com.

Esquire (ISSN 0194-9535) is published six times a year (with combined issues in April/May, Summer, October/November, and Winter, and when future combined issues are published that count as two issues, as indicated on the issue's cover), by Hearst, 300 West 57th St., NY, NY 10019 USA. Steven R. Swartz, President and Chief Executive Officer; William R. Hearst III, Chairman; Frank A. Bennack, Jr., Executive Vice-Chairman. Hearst Magazine Media, Inc.: Debi Chirichella, President, Hearst Magazines Group, and Treasurer; John A. Rohan, Jr., Senior Vice President, Finance; Catherine A. Bostron, Secretary. © 2021 by Hearst Magazine Media, Inc. All rights reserved. Esquire, Man at His Best, Dubious Achievement Awards, The Sound and the Fury, and ® are registered trademarks of Hearst Communications, Inc. Periodicals postage paid at N.Y., N.Y., and additional entry post offices. Canada Post International Publications mail product (Canadian distribution) sales agreement no. 40012499. Editorial and Advertising Offices: 300 West 57th St., NY, NY 10019-3797. Send returns (Canada) to Bleuchip International, P.O. Box 25542, London, Ontario N6C 6B2. Subscription prices: United States and possessions, $7.97 a year; Canada and all other countries, $19.97 a year. Subscription services: Esquire will, upon receipt of a complete subscription order, undertake fulfillment of that order so as to provide the first copy for delivery by the Postal Service or alternate carrier within four to six weeks. From time to time, we make our subscriber list available to companies that sell goods and services by mail that we believe would interest our readers. If you would rather not receive such mailings via postal mail, please send your current mailing label or an exact copy to Mail Preference Service, P.O. Box 6000, Harlan, IA 51593. You can also visit preferences.hearstmags.com to manage your preferences and opt out of receiving marketing offers by e-mail. For customer service, changes of address, and subscription orders, log on to service.mag.com or write to Customer Service Department, Esquire, P.O. Box 6000, Harlan, IA 51593. Esquire is not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts or art. None will be returned unless accompanied by return postage and envelope. Canada BN NBR 10231 0943 RT. Postmaster: Please send address changes to Esquire, P.O. Box 6000, Harlan, IA 51593. Printed in the USA

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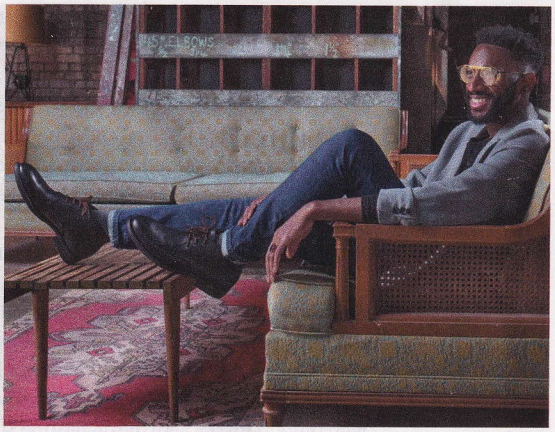

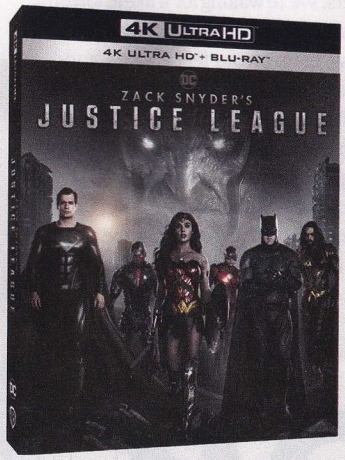

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THE BASEBALL FIGHT

ALBERT PENA/CSM/AP IMAGES

THE MAN ON THE MOUND IS eyeing the batter, his fingers taut on the seams, salivating over that wide-open target that is his prey's broad back. He coils up, and fifty-two uniformed men throughout the ballpark sniff the air, tensing their muscles for the pounce as one. He lets the ball fly. *Thwack*—a bull's-eye. The batter's not down, but he's hurting, his pride more than anything else. He flings the bat away, yanks off his helmet, and charges the mound, where the pitcher's fists are waiting for him.

Chaos ensues. Men stream out of each dugout; there's a mass of bodies churning on the infield grass. Sucker punches land on nearby heads. The TV announcers are wringing their hands, whining, really: "They gotta break this up before someone gets hurt!" The umpires have settled for hanging back on the first baseline, jotting down jersey numbers. And then there's the crowd, on its feet, roaring for blood like so many Romans around the gladiator ring, their Miller Lites sloshing over the rims of cheapo souvenir cups.

Let the boys play? No, let the boys fight, we say.

These days, there is too much honor in America's pastime. It's as if these young athletes signed their five-year contracts with their club options, then held up their right hands and swore on the Bible, "I will not hit a home run on a 3-0 count. I will not slide too heavily into second. I will comport myself with the dignity the Stars and Stripes demands." They are expected to hem and haw and bow and "How do you do, sir?" to their opponents. But then, on the rare occasion that bitterness boils over into unsportsmanlike score settling, we eat it up. Because, frankly—and we say this with no pleasure—baseball is boring right now. It's mired in "unwritten rules" and low batting averages, and there's a dearth of Yanks and Sox chucking fastballs at one another's backs. We're craving on-field tension so palpable that someone just has to tear off his batting helmet and punch the chew—sorry, the bubble gum—out of another player's maw. We want more baseball fights. We endorse them.

The baseball fight is an art form, and no, we're not talking about floating like butterflies or stinging like bees. We're not in favor of some Hemingwayesque donning of masculinity for a bout of fisticuffs, or whatever it is gentlemen do when their integrity is impugned. We prefer tantrums, hissy fits, cheap shots. We approve of Cubs manager Lou Piniella kicking dirt with his cleats at the third-base ump, and Pirates manager Lloyd McClendon snatching first base right from the field and storming to the dugout with it tucked under his arm. In 1974, Indians fans got blitzed on ten-cent beers and bombarded the visiting Rangers' bullpen with firecrackers before rushing the field to take the game into their own clammy hands. Glorious! In 2003, a large Italian sausage—or rather, a runner dressed as a large Italian sausage—passed the dugout at the Brewers' ballpark in a harmless seventh-inning-stretch race against other tubed meats and was hit by a visiting Pirates first baseman with a bat; the police booked the player for misdemeanor battery. (The charges were dismissed later on.) This is what we're talking about.

Nothing beats a dugout clearer of a brawl, which usually stems from a combination of hit batters, aggrieved pitchers, and sore losers who can no longer hold their anger in, even though baseball's de facto rules request that players *please hold their anger in—we won't ask again.* In the innings leading up to one, we're sweating rivulets as the animosity simmers. We're waiting for it like a horror-movie jump scare. And when it finally happens in the bottom of the eighth, we're up on our feet giving a standing O as the teams swarm and collide and punch, then get broken up and drift apart until a lone wolf instigates a mini fight that retriggers the main event, and our voices are hoarse from giving orders to *attack!,* and players are out there getting their jerseys ripped off, and the umps are throwing "You're outta here!" arms all over the place.

The baseball fight is the people's art. Call us connoisseurs.

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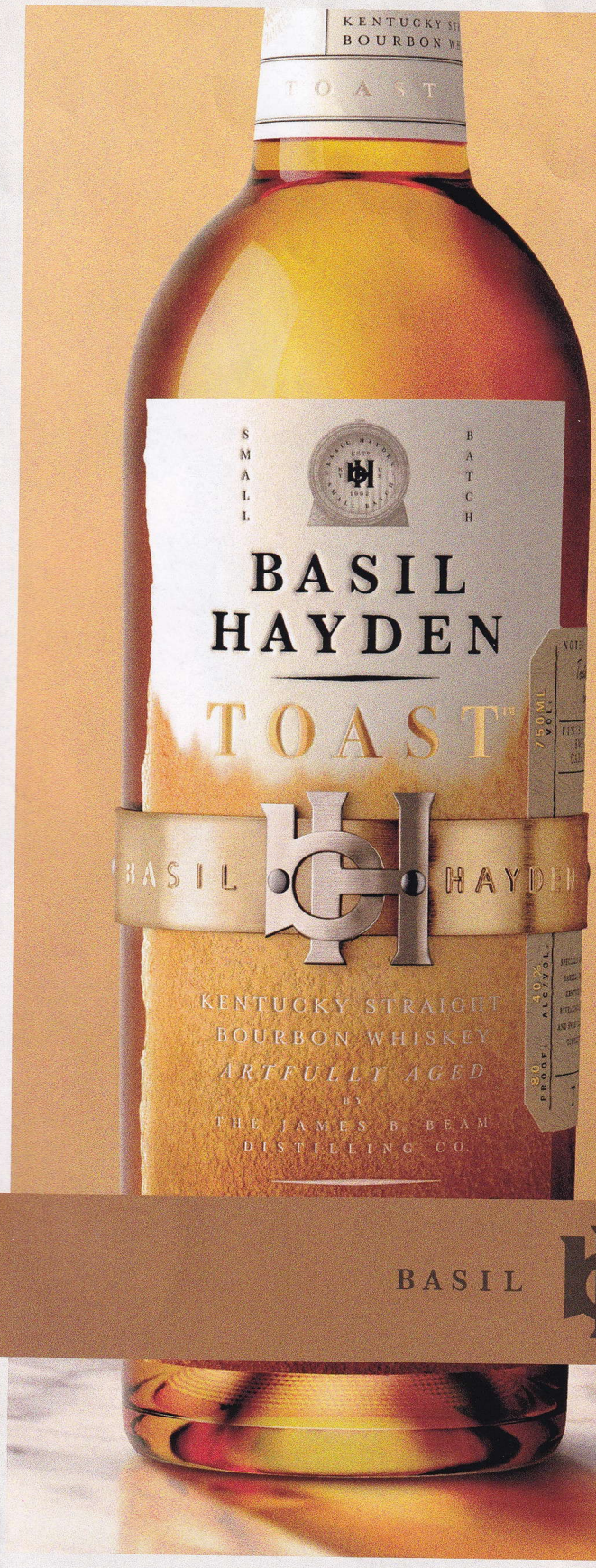

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